不思議部!!
健速
Takehaya
7

六畳間の侵略者!? 7

クリスマスに揺れる乙女心

INVADERS of the ROKUJYOMA!? 7

そして、上空に浮かぶあやしげな影……
里見孝太郎、あやうし!!

健速 たけはや

「あの日々をもういちど」(HJ文庫)で作家デビュー。最近あった良い事は、近所の小さな書店にもHJ文庫が並ぶようになった事。

ポコ

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好物はやきそば。最近は近くのパン屋のやきそばパンにハマり中。

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た03-02-07

健速

六畳間の侵略者!? 7

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クリスマスも近づく12月も下旬に、ないしょでバイトを増やした孝太郎。「恋人が出来たんじゃ!?」などと周囲をわくわく＆やきもきさせる中、秘密でお金を稼ぐ孝太郎の目的は!?そんな騒動の中、ティア渾身の舞台劇「青騎士」第2幕台本が完成。年明け公開に向け、演劇の練習も加速する。閑話休題、とみせつつ怒涛の展開をみせる、圧縮系ラブコメ第7弾!!

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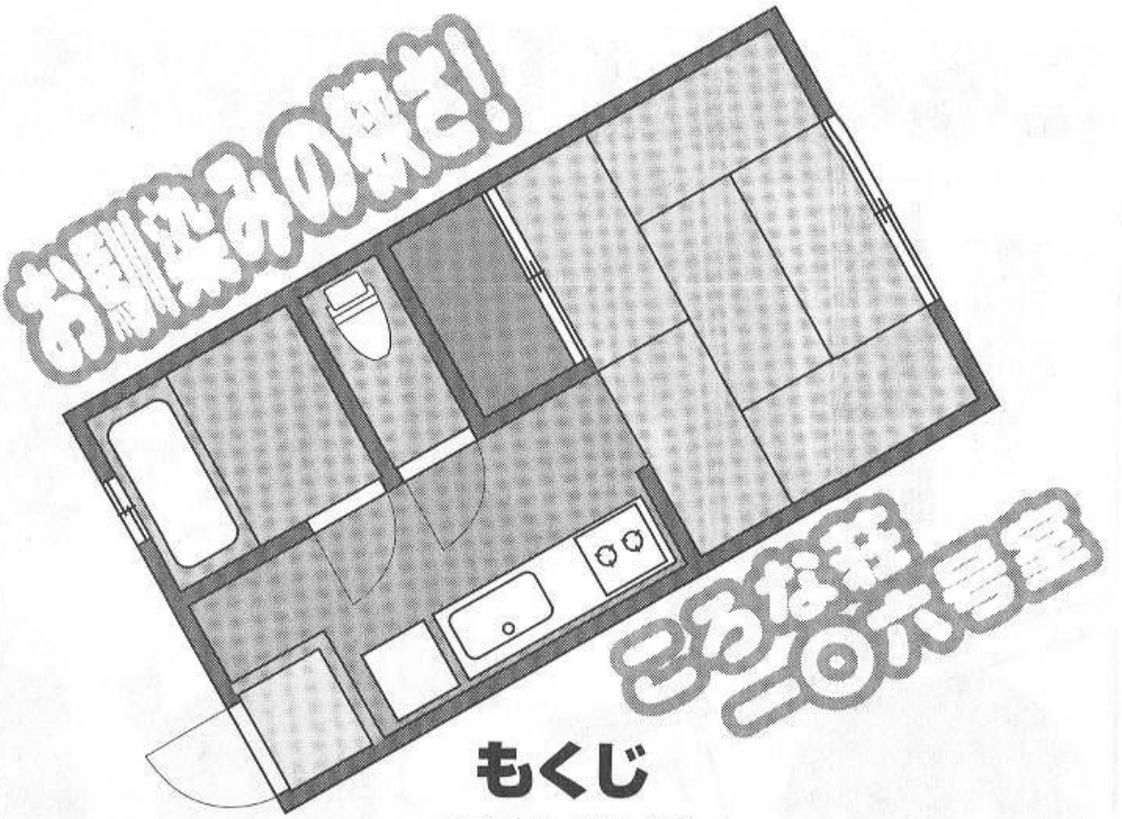

もくじ

十二月二十二日（火）
サンタと晴海 ……007
十二月二十二日（火）
それぞれのクリスマス事情…042
十二月二十三日（水）
就職戦線とお姫様気分……073
十二月二十四日（木）
クリスマスイブ……120
一月十日（日）
火竜帝と白銀の姫……165
一月十七日（日）
理想の騎士 ……189
一月二十四日（日）
答え、そして祈り……217
一月二十四日（日）
約束……274
あとがき……294

Contents

Santa and Harumi 10
Part 1 10
Part 2 15
Part 3 20
Part 4 24
Everyone's Christmas Circumstances 25
Part 1 25
Part 2 29
Part 3 39
The Job Hunting Battlefront and Feeling Like a Princess 41
Part 1 41
Part 2 46
Part 3 49
Part 4 52
Part 5 54
Christmas Eve 60
Part 1 60
Part 2 65
Part 3 70
Part 4 75
Part 5 80
The Fire Dragon Emperor and the Silver Princess 82
Part 1 82
Part 2 85
Part 3 87
Part 4 91
The Ideal Knight 93
Part 1 93
Part 2 96
Answer and Prayer 105
Part 1 105
Part 2 109
Part 3 119
Part 4 125
Promise 129
Part 1 129
Part 2 133
Afterword 138

ころな荘の関係者たち
主人公
里見孝太郎
ころな荘二〇六号室の、いちおうの借主で主人公。
悪友
松平賢治
孝太郎の幼なじみで親友。
先輩
桜庭晴海
孝太郎の所属する編み物部の部長で、一年先輩。ちょっと病弱。
大家
笠置静香
孝太郎の同級生でころな荘の大家さん。

東本願早苗
想い出のころな荘一〇六号室に取り憑き、独占を狙う幽霊。
幽霊
クラノ＝キリハ
一〇六号室を祭壇化、それを足がかりとして地上侵略を狙う地底人。
地底人
虹野ゆりか
自称"魔法少女"。一〇六号室に危機が迫っていると主張する。
コスプレイヤー?
ティアミリス・グレ・フォルトーゼ
皇位継承の試練のため一〇六号室とその住人の支配を狙う宇宙人。
ルースカニア・ナイ・パルドムシーハ
ティアの付き人で世話係。
宇宙人

Santa and Harumi

Part 1

Tuesday, December 22

The bowling ball Koutarou threw bounced lightly once before heading straight down the lane. With quite a bit of speed, the bowling ball quickly reached the end of the 20-meter long lane.

The ball hit the middle pin, just as planned, and mowed down all the pins behind it. The pins outside of the ball's course were taken down by the other pins.

"Fall down, all of you fall down!"

Koutarou shouted out with a loud voice, as if trying to knock over the pins with his fighting spirit. However, his fighting spirit didn't reach all of the pins, leaving one standing.

"Damn it, it wasn't enough."

"Kou, you're too straightforward."

Laughing at Koutarou as his shoulders dropped, Kenji stood up from his chair. Since it was a pair's game, Kenji was up next.

"If you don't put a little bit more spin into it and stop aiming for the center pin, you're just going to be relying on luck."

"Shut up. Just let me do what I want. Those petty tricks of yours just aren't for me."

"Putting a little spin into it doesn't count as a trick."

Having traded places with Koutarou, Kenji threw his ball with beautiful form. Unlike Koutarou's throw, the ball rolled down the lane in a smooth curve, thanks to the spin put on the ball.

It then rolled into the last remaining pin.

"See?"

"With only one pin left, it doesn't matter if you put a spin on it or not."

Thanks to Kenji's precise throw, they got a spare. But Koutarou looked like he was in a somewhat bad mood.

Today was December 22nd, and although it was the afternoon of a weekday, they had the day off thanks to the winter vacation.

Making use of the vacation, they had come to a bowling alley by the station to play. The reason why the two of them were playing together was because they were participating in a pair's competition.

"What a catch."

"We didn't get first place though."

"Why do you always have to rain on other's parades, Mackenzie-kun."

Leaving the bowling alley, the two of them were holding gift certificates. In the end, they got a score of 180. It was quite a high score for amateurs; thanks to that, they ranked rather high and received a reward. What they had gotten were gift cards for the nearby shopping mall for 2,000 yen.

"I like to aim for the top."

"And my life-style is on the line."

Santa and Harumi

Although they hadn't gotten an impressive amount, to Koutarou who lived on his own, it was a welcomed income. To him, this gift certificate was more valuable than the first place prize trip to Hawaii. A trip to Hawaii would only add to all the extra expenses he already had to deal with during the winter. This 2,000 yen gift certificate was just perfect for him right now.

“Ah, that's right, I have a present for someone as poor as you.”

Remembering something as they were talking, Kenji began searching through his bag. When Koutarou turned to look at him, Kenji had pulled out two booklets.

“What are those?”

“Don't give me that. This is the reason we met up in the first place.”

“Oh yeah.”

The words 'The Silver Princess and the Blue Knight, Chapter 2' were written on the cover of the booklet. It was the new manuscript that Theia had finished writing the other day.

The main reason Koutarou and Kenji had met up today was to play. What created this opportunity was that Kenji wanted to give Koutarou the new manuscript.’

“Hmm, this time it's actually a book.”

Koutarou let out words of admiration as he flipped through the pages. The previous manuscript had been written on paper held together by a paper clip, but this time it had been bound like a book.

“The budget's increased this time around after all.”

“It's kind of a nice feeling.”

Thanks to the popularity of the previous play, the drama club's budget was increased. And because the shopping mall sponsored them, they received help from that side as well. Because of that, the next play was going to be on a considerably larger scale.

“By the way, why are there two?”

“One is for Sakuraba-senpai. You'll meet during club activities anyway, right?”

“Ah, I see. I got it. I'll give it to her.”

Koutarou nodded and put the two booklets into his own bag.

The knitting society had club activities planned during the winter vacation. Since they had activities planned tomorrow, he was planning on giving it to her then.

“Right then.”

After putting away his luggage, Koutarou took out his cellphone to check the time. It was now past 3PM.

“Mackenzie, it's about time so I'm going to go.”

“What, you're going home already? Can't you stay a while longer?”

“I can't. I actually picked up a new part-time job.”

“Another?”

“Distributing flyers for a cake shop.”

Koutarou's and Kenji's ruin excavation job was still ongoing; however, since they were reaching the end of the year, the excavation was put on hold. So meanwhile, Koutarou picked up a new part-time job.

Santa and Harumi

“Is it that rough for you? Your old man's helping you with money, right?”

“Not touching your old man's money is how a proper man lives.”

Koutarou proudly laughed and put his cellphone back into his pocket. He then easily turned his back on Kenji.

“Well, see ya.”

“Yeah, see you later.”

Koutarou then carried on walking, not turning around to look at Kenji.

“…Hmm, a new part-time job, is it…”

Having been left behind, Kenji stared at Koutarou while tilting his head. Something about Koutarou picking up a new part-time job was bothering him.

Since Kenji worked with Koutarou at the ruins excavation site, he had a good understanding of Koutarou's financial state. Knowing that, even though it was the end of the year, he didn't think Koutarou needed another part-time job.

“…He hasn’t been hanging out with me that much lately either. Did he get a girlfriend? And now he's working on getting some Christmas funds? No, that can't be it…”

While Kenji was mumbling to himself, someone approached him.

“A girlfriend? Did you start dating another girl, Mackenzie-kun?”

“Oh? Where did Satomi-sama go?”

Shizuka and Ruth approached Kenji. The two of them had come to the station to shop at the supermarket. As they left, they saw Koutarou and Kenji and came up to the outside of the bowling alley.

“Oh? Kasagi-san and Ruth-san?”

“Hello, Mackenzie-kun.”

“Hello. So where did Satomi-sama go, Mackenzie-sama? It looked like he was here just a moment ago.”

Having finished their greetings, Ruth looked around the area for Koutarou.

Because there were plenty of housewives coming shopping, they could no longer see him.

Santa and Harumi

Santa and Harumi

“Kou said he had a new part-time job and left just a moment ago.”

“A new part-time job? Did you hear anything about that, Ruth-san?”

“No, this is news to me.”

Neither Shizuka nor Ruth had heard about the new part-time job.

“You haven't heard about it either?”

“You neither, Mackenzie-kun?”

“Yes, I just heard about it now. But if neither of you have heard about it… this is starting look suspicious…”

Kenji grinned while looking in the direction Koutarou had left. It looked very similar to the grin Koutarou would make when he would prank Kenji. Seeing that, Ruth asked Kenji what he meant.

“What do you mean by suspicious?”

“Kou didn't tell his close friends anything about his new part-time job. So I was thinking that he might have gotten a girlfriend and is saving up money for dates.”

Kenji was thinking that Koutarou may have gotten a girlfriend.

He hadn't said anything about his new part-time job to Kenji, Ruth or the others. Kenji was an old friend, and Koutarou had been getting along well with Ruth and the others lately. But keeping it quiet even then made Kenji suspect that Koutarou might have some shady secret or was spending money on something he didn't want others to know about. Since he couldn't imagine Koutarou committing crimes, the possibilities were limited.

So, Kenji reasoned that Koutarou might have gotten a girlfriend.

If Kenji was found hanging out with a girl, Koutarou, Shizuka and the others would make a big deal out of it. So Koutarou might have been hiding the existence of his girlfriend to keep the same thing from happening to him.

“Satomi-kun has a girlfriend, huh. Who could it be… I really want to know!”

After hearing Kenji's thoughts, Shizuka's eyes began sparkling. Since she loved this kind of topic, she immediately began imagining pairings.

“Satomi-sama has a lover…?”

Ruth showed the complete opposite reaction to Shizuka. Her normally mild expression changed into a severe bitter one.

It couldn't be that his relation with Kiriha-sama progressed…

Koutarou's women troubles would become Theia's troubles. Because of that, Ruth couldn't easily overlook it.

Part 2

Unaware of the attention being gathered around him, Koutarou was working hard at his part-time job.

“How about a cake for Christmas? At the Harukaze Bakery, we're accepting reservations for Christmas cakes!”

Koutarou's new part-time was wearing a Santa outfit while handing out flyers.

The bakery in front of the station 'Harukaze Bakery' had begun selling their Christmas cakes for the year. Koutarou was handing out flyers to advertise that.

“How about a cake for Christmas? At the Harukaze Bakery, we're accepting reservations for Christmas cakes!”

The Harukaze Bakery where Koutarou was working wasn't the only place selling Christmas cakes. In fact, the supermarket, the department store, the convenience store and the confections store were all rivals. So by handing out flyers, they wanted to get as big of a market share as possible. Not having recovered from the recent recession, there were fierce fights going on to sell even a single cake.

Really, it's such a nice feeling…

As Koutarou was handing out flyers to people, he thought that to himself. Koutarou and the bakery were in a similar situation.

However, there was definite difference between the two.

“Good evening, Santa.”

A familiar, cheerful voice rang out. When that gentle voice reached Koutarou's ears, he stopped moving.

“Oh? Sakuraba-senpai?”

When he turned to the direction of the voice, he saw Harumi smiling in the cold winds raging through the mall. Her figure was thin, and she gave off the impression of being fragile, but when Koutarou saw her, he felt a strange warm sensation. That was because Koutarou correctly understood the girl called Sakuraba Harumi.

As their eyes met, Harumi's smile changed. It was the mischievous smile she only recently started showing.

“Fufu, I think I've been a good child this year, so may I have a flyer?”

Harumi smiled as she reached her hands out. It looked like a child asking for a present from her father.

“Ahaha, if it's new manuscript you want, I have one.”

“That doesn't count as a present. Please maintain your pride as Santa.”

“Please don't ask too much from a part-time Santa.”

“Fufufu.”

Koutarou smiled and laughed alongside Harumi. Recently, the two of them had been able to joke around with one another.

Harumi's progress was largely thanks to Yurika's love advice. The practical side wasn't of any use, but Harumi's attitude had begun changing.

Nothing good would come from waiting.

Santa and Harumi

Thanks to Yurika, those feelings began budding inside of Harumi.

“For starters, here's a flyer.”

“Thank you, Santa.”

Koutarou handed one of his flyers over to Harumi. She then began to ardently read the content.

“I'll give you the manuscript in the clubroom tomorrow. I left my luggage at the bakery.”

“Please do.”

It seemed like she was really interested in the cake, as she answered without taking her eyes off the flyer. Normally she would look straight at Koutarou when she was talking to him. So even Koutarou could tell that she was being distracted by the cake. Koutarou began laughing, finding Harumi's behavior cute or funny.

“Fufu, hahaha.”

“Satomi-kun?”

Wondering what Koutarou was laughing about, Harumi looked at Koutarou while still holding onto the flyer.

“What's wrong?”

“Ah, no, kuku, you just looked so childish, it just came out. Kuku, kukuku.”

“Satomi-kun…”

Harumi noticed her own behavior and began blushing. She then puffed up her red cheeks and pouted while staring at Koutarou.

“You shouldn't be laughing at others while you're wearing such a cute outfit.”

“It's my job after all.”

“I hate it when you're so blunt, Satomi-kun.”

After staring at Koutarou with her cheeks dyed red for a while, Harumi revealed a small smile and held her hands out again.

“Can I borrow that hat?”

“This?”

“Yes.”

Koutarou listened to Harumi and removed his Santa hat and gave it to Harumi. After staring at it for a while, she put it on her own head.

“How do I look?”

“More childish than before, very cute.”

“Satomi-kun!”

“But if that's the case, take this too.”

Disregarding Harumi's protests, Koutarou thrust his hand into a nearby large bag. The bag which was a part of the Santa outfit was mostly filled with cotton; however, there was something besides cotton inside it.

“You should wear this too.”

“Thank you, Satomi-kun.”

Santa and Harumi

Koutarou had pulled out a spare Santa outfit from the bag. This year, Koutarou was the only one handing out flyers, but it seemed like in the past there had been two. Having received the outfit from Koutarou, Harumi put it on top of her uniform.

“How do I look?”

After putting on the Santa hat and Santa robe, Harumi spun around with her arms stretched out.

Oh… You look good, even in this, Sakuraba-senpai…

That's what Koutarou thought when he looked at Harumi in her outfit, but he said the opposite thing.

“It's funny, you look like you're taking part in a literary arts exhibition” [1]

“Satomi-kun, you've been getting meaner lately.”

Just like Harumi had become able to show various emotions in front of Koutarou, the same was true for him. In the past, he wouldn't have made jokes like these. This change had happened thanks to Harumi mustering up her courage.

This is nice, this feeling…

Harumi could feel the change as well and enjoyed her back and forth conversation with Koutarou. This was what she had wanted.

I think I can work a little harder…

So Harumi decided to work a little harder, she couldn't leave it like this. If she waited, nothing would change, that way of thought supported Harumi.

“Satomi-kun, give me some more flyers.”

“Senpai?”

Once again, Harumi held her hands out.

“There doesn't seem to be much left, so I'll help you.”

“Ah, no, this is my part-time job, so I can't have you—”

“You gave me a flyer before. Just give me some more.”

“That's not what I—”

“Ei!”

“Ah.”

While Koutarou was protesting, Harumi took half of the flyers he was holding. Since there was roughly 50 flyers left, Harumi took around 25.

“Senpai…”

“Fufu. Is this all? This hardly counts as helping out, Satomi-kun.”

Koutarou had a troubled look on his face while Harumi smiled with flyers in hand.

Although their outfits were the same, their expressions were the opposite.

“How about a Christmas cake? Then please stop by the Harukaze bakery!”

“Satomi-kun.”

---

[1] An event held in grade school.

Santa and Harumi

Once the last flyer left Koutarou's hands, Harumi returned empty handed as well. Although she was almost being carried away by the crowd, Harumi smiled brightly.

“Satomi-kun, I'm all done!”

“Same here. We finished in an instant thanks to you, Sakuraba-senpai.”

Once Harumi lent a hand, the flyers seemingly vanished. Having a cute girl wear a Santa outfit seemed to really help. Because of that, it took less than 10 minutes before they had finished handing out all the flyers.

“Fufu, I'm glad to have been of help.”

“You really helped out. Thank you, senpai.”

Koutarou bowed to Harumi while she cheerfully laughed. As he bowed, he remembered how he had felt while they were handing out flyers.

“Still, Sakuraba-senpai, you seemed to have changed since spring.”

“Eh? L-Like what?”

Harumi touched her body and face while making an anxious expression. She thought that Koutarou meant that she had physically changed. She was a girl too; having someone of the opposite gender point out that she had changed made her worry, even more so with Koutarou pointing it out.

“Do you mean I got fatter, or thinner? I don't think I've changed.”

“You're wrong, geez…”

Koutarou smiled wryly at Harumi's response.

Sakuraba-senpai really has changed a little…

As he stared at Harumi who had begun to panic, Koutarou reaffirmed his thoughts. On top of her current behavior, back in spring, Harumi wouldn't have had the courage to hand out flyers. In reality, in spring while recruiting, she was quiet and hadn't stood out. And that girl was now helping to hand out flyers. It was hard to believe that she had problems dealing with people. This was an enormous step forward that even Koutarou noticed.

“In the past, you weren't very comfortable about standing in front of people, Sakuraba-senpai. But now you're helping me hand out flyers. You're like a different person from back then in spring.”

“S-Satomi-kun.”

When Koutarou honestly complimented her, Harumi began blushing. Harumi herself was well aware of her change, and why it had happened. So having Koutarou compliment her made her feel really embarrassed.

“Well, if you appear in a play or on a hero show, you're bound to get some confidence and courage.”

“That might be true.”

Harumi's words satisfied Koutarou. Having appeared in front of people at a play and hero show, she would naturally get more used to that environment.

I thought I would be causing her problems, but it seemed to have worked out in the end.

“…Besides, Satomi-kun was with me the entire time.”

“What?”

Santa and Harumi

Lost in thought, Koutarou missed what Harumi had said.

“Ah, n-no, it's nothing, nothing at all!”

Harumi panicked and waved her hands around, trying to cover up her slip of the tongue. She had accidentally let her true intentions slip, but she couldn't let Koutarou know about that yet. So if Koutarou had missed what she said, she was fine with that.

“Is that so?”

Koutarou didn't find Harumi's behavior suspicious, since he knew that Harumi wasn't good at receiving praise and compliments. So he just assumed that this time was the same. So Koutarou himself moved on to the next topic; he actually had something he wanted to talk about.

“Anyway, in the end you ended up helping me with my work, so I should thank you in some way.”

Koutarou was planning on thanking Harumi. He couldn't just leave it with her helping him out with a job that he did to earn money.

But, Sakuraba-senpai is too reserved when it comes to this kind of thing too…

Although Harumi was grateful for the offer, even now she was shaking her head as if to say that it wasn't necessary.

“There's no need for thanks for something like this.”

“That won't do. It's not like you helped me with club activities or volunteering.”

Hm?

At that point, Koutarou's eyes stopped at the Santa outfit Harumi was wearing.

That's it, then let's do that!

Koutarou thought of a plan and began talking to Harumi at once.

“Sakuraba-senpai, are you free on the 24th?”

“The 24th?”

When Koutarou mentioned that date, Harumi's heart began pounding.

Today was the 22nd, so the 24th would be two days from now. The month was December, so that would make the 24th-

That's Christmas Eve…

When someone of the opposite sex she was interested in mentioned that date, she couldn't help but let her imagination run wild.

“I-I'm free, but…”

Harumi used every last brain cell to think while she desperately hid her shock and forced some words out of her mouth. Her anxiousness when she stood on the stage was next to nothing when compared to now.

“I see. Then could you give me some of your time?”

“Ah—”

So when Koutarou invited her, her heart almost stopped.

Part 3

What welcomed Koutarou home to room 106 was, oddly enough, Theia's cheerful smile. Her eyes were sparkling and she was holding a booklet with her left hand next to her chest. When she looked at Koutarou's face, she held out her free hand.

“I'm ba—”

“I've been waiting, Koutarou. Hurry on in.”

Theia's right hand quickly grabbed Koutarou's arm and she dragged him into the room before he could even say his greetings.

“H-Hey, wait, my shoes are still on.”

“You can enter with your shoes, I'll permit it.”

“You can't… wa-wait!”

Koutarou somehow managed to leave his shoes by the entrance while losing his balance. Sanae, who was nearby, then neatly arranged the shoes.

“I get that you're happy, but you're not a kid…”

Sanae was amazed by Theia, but in reality, Theia's current behavior wasn't much different from her own. However, Sanae herself didn't realize that.

“Welcome home, Satomi-sama.”

“You're back, Koutarou.”

Theia pulled Koutarou past Ruth and Kiriha who were in the kitchen preparing dinner, and approached the inner room. Yurika, who was watching TV in the middle of the room, cleared out of Theia's way as she approached.

As they approached the inner wall, a rectangle began glowing. That glowing rectangle was a door that led to the Blue Knight.

“Koutarou, we'll start right away.”

“Start what?”

When Koutarou asked her that, Theia finally stopped.

What's going on with Theia?

Koutarou could finally catch his break as she stopped. At the same time, she turned around to look at him. She then slightly pouted as she pointed the booklet in her left hand at Koutarou's face.

“The Silver Princess and the Blue Knight, Chapter 2”

Oh, now I get it. No wonder…

As he read the cover of the booklet, Koutarou finally understood why Theia was so excited. It was a new manuscript that Theia had written herself. Koutarou had often seen her writing, so he understood why she was so invested in it.

By the way, the manuscript that Theia was holding was given to her by Ruth. She had gotten the booklet from Kenji, just like Koutarou had.

The moment after Koutarou had understood the circumstances, the booklet slowly sank, and Theia's face poked out from behind it.

“…”

Theia's expression looked somewhat anxious and apologetic. To Koutarou, she looked like a puppy apologizing for her failures.

Koutarou's train of thought was correct, and Theia noticed that she was getting too worked up. Her expression was to check if he was angry or not.

“Ah…”

At first Koutarou planned on complaining, but he soon swallowed his complaint when he saw Theia's face.

Don't look at me with those kind of eyes, geez…

Her eyes wavered with worry. Seeing that, Koutarou scratched his head and gave her a bitter smile.

“I got it. But I have preparations to make, so wait a minute.”

“Ah…”

Theia's expression brightened immediately, while at the same time her cheeks turned red. She was relieved that Koutarou wasn't angry, and at the same time embarrassed by her own behavior.

“Sorry, Koutarou. I got a little ahead of myself when I got the manuscript. Let's postpone practice for now.”

She then let go of Koutarou's hand that she had been holding.

You always go easy on her when she makes a face like that, that's why you're always having a hard time, Koutarou.

As he stared at Theia, Koutarou scolded himself. But even as he did that, he still felt like doing what Theia wanted as he stared at her.

Even in the middle of dinner, Theia was flipping through the pages of the manuscript. She carried food to her mouth while reading through the manuscript to make sure there were no errors in it.

“Fufu.”

Ruth revealed a small smile as she looked at Theia. Normally she would have warned her about her manners, but Ruth decided to overlook it this time. Ruth knew how much time Theia had spent on this play, and the reason behind that was her admiration for the Blue Knight and her yearning to see her mother Elfaria. Since they had been together for so long, Ruth noticed Theia's feelings.

“How about seconds, Satomi-sama?”

“Yes please.”

“Very well, I'll get right to it.”

Ruth had begun secretly taking care of Koutarou's health. She would maintain Koutarou's health until the play starting a month from now. It was the important role that only Ruth could do.

As always, thank you very much, Satomi-sama…

Koutarou handed Ruth his teacup.

Ruth hadn't just begun taking care of Koutarou's health because of the play. It was a sign of her gratitude for always causing him so much trouble.

“Koutarou, this time there are a lot of fight scenes. So this time, I'd like to focus on combat practice.”

Santa and Harumi

“So you mean there's no training in knight manners!?”

“Yes. This time, the play is about war, so there are few scenes where manners are important. Of course, if we have time to spare we'll train on it.”

“Alright, I'm on! This is great!”

Ruth had been filling up the teacup and preparing seconds while listening to Koutarou's and Theia's training policy, and that's when she remembered that she had something she wanted advice on.

“Satomi-sama, Shizuka-sama, do you have a moment?”

“Yes?”

“What is it, Ruth-san?”

“Actually, I have something I want to discuss.”

Ruth put down Koutarou's cup on the tea table and corrected her posture. Koutarou who was talking to Theia, and Shizuka who was drinking tea, picked up on Ruth's serious attitude and corrected their posture as well.

“Well then, you said you had something to discuss.”

“Yes. I remembered after hearing her highness and Satomi-sama speaking, I want to practice too— I mean, teach me how to fight.”

The topic Ruth had brought up was something no one expected her to mention. Koutarou's and Shizuka's eyes opened wide in surprise and they looked at each other.

“Practice? Are you serious?”

“Yes, of course I am.”

Shizuka instinctively let those words out, but Ruth nodded assertively.

“What can I say, I don't really know why either, I just felt like I had to become stronger a while back.”

Ruth brought her sharp eyebrows together. Her eyes were serious.

“A while back…”

“Do you mean…”

Koutarou and Shizuka came to the same conclusion.

They both thought of the time when Ruth had lost to Kabutonga after intruding on the hero show. Both Shizuka, who had been doing the fighting as Kabutonga, and Koutarou, who had heard about it later, realized that was the reason.

“I have to become stronger! There's a powerful enemy I just have to defeat, I just can't help but feel that way!”

Ruth had no memories of when she had lost her mind. However, her defeat against Kabutonga (or more precisely, Shizuka) had burned into her mind. It implanted a desire for her to get stronger.

“So you want to get stronger…”

Sensing Ruth's strong determination, Koutarou glanced over at Theia. Noticing his glance, Theia shook her head with a sad expression on her face.

What do you mean it's too much for you? That's just far too irresponsible…

Koutarou read and understood her intentions from her small gesture, and his shoulders dropped as he was unsure whether to be amazed or troubled.

“You don't need to learn how to fight, right Ruth-san? Koutarou has been getting better at using a sword recently as well.”

“That won't do!”

Ruth's fist slammed down on the tea table. The tableware on the table crashed into each other because of the impact and caused a loud noise.

“I don't know the reason, but my soul is screaming that I can't leave this to Satomi-sama!”

“Ha-hahaha, I see…”

Shizuka let out a dry laugh and began sweating cold sweat.

This is all your fault, Satomi-kun!

Shizuka glared at Koutarou and complained about him in her mind.

Ruth couldn't leave this fight to Koutarou, partially because he hadn't become Theia's vassal yet, but the biggest reason was that deep inside, she didn't want Koutarou and Kabutonga to meet.

She didn't want Koutarou to see any beetles.

Suffering from her defeat against Kabutonga, an encounter between Kabutonga and Koutarou would be the end of her.

“I-I pass. I'll leave it to Satomi-kun.”

“Ah, that's playing dirty, landlord-san!”

“What good would come from me teaching her how to fight!?”

“T-That's true, but…”

Koutarou realized the situation when he saw Shizuka, half crying.

I guess she doesn't want to teach Ruth-san how to defeat her…

Training Ruth would mean that she would train to defeat Kabutonga, or Shizuka. So Koutarou couldn't really say anything when she refused.

“Besides, Satomi-kun will be training together with Theia-san, right? You just need to do it together!”

“Please, Satomi-sama! This is important, probably!”

“H-Hah…”

This situation got strange all of a sudden…

Koutarou nodded at Ruth, but in reality his head was hurting.

Part 4

A cold glance was watching over room 106.

“Hmph, like always, they have no sense of urgency.”

That cold glance came from a nearby observation device that transferred the footage to a distant place. The glance belonged to Clariossa Daora Forthorthe, the second princess of Forthorthe, Theia's rival for the throne.

“I may have waited long enough for that to happen, but it's quite irritating. I'll make you regret forcing me to live this way soon enough!”

Clan irritably adjusted her glasses and glared at the monitor in front of her. She was in the cockpit of a spaceship. She was sitting in the pilot seat, facing a monitor displaying footage of room 106.

She was in the middle of a mountain, isolated from any people, where her spaceship had been cleverly concealed. She had only sent back her personal battleship, Hazy Moon, to Forthorthe, while she remained on Earth in a smaller vessel. If she just stayed low there for a while, Theia and the others would assume that she had gone back to Forthorthe.

In reality, everything was proceeding just as planned, and she was no longer being mentioned in room 106. The situation was just as she had schemed, but in order to be forgotten, she had spent close to two months living uncomfortably, which made her angrier.

“You'll be the first one, fake Blue Knight!”

Clan glared at Koutarou through the monitor.

On top of her personal grudge, she was directing all of her anger from these past two months towards Koutarou.

“You, that's right, you, I'll dispose of you in the way that would make Theiamillis-san the most mortified!”

First off was Koutarou.

To Clan, right now, Theia was just an added bonus to dealing with him.

Everyone's Christmas Circumstances

Part 1

Tuesday, December 22

Koutarou presented Yurika with two cards.

“Come on, pick one, Yurika.”

“Hmmmmm…”

Yurika stared at the cards in front of her. Since she could only see the back of the cards, she had no way of knowing what each card was. Yurika stared intensely at them as if trying to look through the cards.

Today, the battle for ownership of the room was being determined by card games for the first time in a while. They each suggested a game they were good at and had everyone participate in every game. Right now they were playing their fifth game, Old Maid, which was Yurika's suggestion.

The game had already progressed to the last stage. Although no one had lost yet, everyone had between one to three cards left, and the match was about to end.

Koutarou's hand consisted of the joker and the ace of spades, while Yurika had only one card left. Koutarou wanted Yurika to take the joker off his hands.

“They won't become transparent if you stare at them long enough you know, so just hurry up and draw one.”

“But if I do and get the old maid, it would be bad for me.”

“It wouldn't be bad for me.”

“T-That's mean, Sanae-chan.”

Yurika's hand alternated between the two cards. This situation was causing the normally indecisive Yurika to hesitate even more than usual. So it was only obvious for Sanae to rush her along. Even after hesitating for a while, she would still draw the old maid. That had always been the case up until now.

“Fight! Yurika!”

Yurika pumped herself up and donned a sharp expression. She then made up her mind and grabbed one of the cards in Koutarou's hand.

“Eeeii!!”

She drew the card with a yell. Since she was scared of drawing the old maid, she had both of her eyes closed. She then brought the card to her face and fearfully opened one of her eyes.

Everyone's Christmas Circumstances

“Ah!?”

As she did, her expression brightened up. The card she had pulled had ace of spades written on it with large letters.

“I did it! I'm out!!”

Yurika put her card and the card she had drawn together and threw them onto the tea table. She raised her hands into the air and cheered.

“Hoo…”

Seeing that, Kiriha seemed impressed. Having constantly lost, Yurika's victory only prolonged the battle for room 106. Since Kiriha wanted a situation like that, she welcomed Yurika's victory.

“Eeeh!? Yurika won again!?”

Meanwhile, Sanae seemed dissatisfied. She pouted as she looked at the cards that had been thrown on the table. Sanae just hated losing, so she couldn't accept Yurika winning.

“Are you cheating or something!?”

“O-Of course I'm not!”

Yurika hurriedly shook her head as Sanae pointed at her. There was actually one more thing she couldn't accept, and that was Yurika's recent win streak.

Yurika would still lose as always when playing games that required brains over brawns, but for some reason, she got really lucky when playing games depending on luck. Thanks to that, Yurika had been able to slowly gather points and escape the dangerous situation she was in.

“Calm down, Sanae. At the very least, she's not cheating.”

“That's not true! No matter how you think about it, it's weird that Yurika is winning this much!”

Even though Koutarou was trying to reason with her, Sanae couldn't accept it. Yurika's winning streak was so remarkable that it didn't make sense to Sanae.

“Thank you, Satomi-saaa~n! I knew you were a good person from the day we first met!”

Tears of gratitude streamed down Yurika's cheeks when she received some unexpected support from Koutarou. Just like always, she grabbed his hand and intensely shook it.

Fufufu, Satomi-san really is my ally. He really understands me.

Yurika was happy that Koutarou believed in her.

“Calm down, Sanae. Just believe in Yurika a little, will you?”

While his hand was still being shaken by Yurika, Koutarou calmly attempted to persuade Sanae.

“That's right. I'm not cheating.”

Yurika smiled and followed Koutarou's lead. Since he was on her side this time, Yurika was extra stubborn.

“But-”

“Just think about it. This is Yurika, you know? She couldn't possibly cheat.”

“Huh?”

However, the next moment, Yurika's smile froze in place. Koutarou's follow-up was changing into something unexpected.

“Kiriha-san aside, how would Yurika cheat without us catching on? She's clumsy and can't even maintain a proper poker face.”

Everyone's Christmas Circumstances

Koutarou didn't even consider the possibility of Yurika cheating.

More precisely, Yurika's not cheating. Instead…

Koutarou turned towards Kiriha. She happily looked at Sanae and Yurika.

In Koutarou's mind, it made much more sense for Kiriha to be giving Yurika cards to make it easier for her to win.

Kiriha is probably not cheating either.

Neither Yurika nor Kiriha was cheating. That was Koutarou's conclusion.

“…That's true. I'm sorry for doubting you, Yurika. I was wrong. It's far too unreasonable for someone as clumsy as you to cheat.”

“Yeah, just believe in her, Sanae. She can't possibly cheat.”

“That's what you meant when you said believe in me!?”

However, in the end, Yurika still shed tears of sorrow.

Part 2

“I'll definitely cheat; an amazing cheat that no one will notice…”

When Yurika, who was mumbling to herself and facing the wall, turned around to look behind her, she could see the other residents calmly drinking tea. There were six cups of tea on the table; six because Shizuka had come to play with them, while not counting Sanae, who couldn't drink on her own.

In the end, today's card games ended with Yurika's victory. Her luck had played a big part in her victories. A lot of points had streamed down from Theia, who was in the lead, down to Yurika.

“Koutarou, once the break is over we'll do a little training.”

“Would a little training even count as training?”

“If you're bothered by that, I won't mind if we make that a lot of training.”

“No, I'm not bothered in the slightest, princess Theiamillis.”

“It seems like you're well aware now of who your master is, Satomi Koutarou.”

“Who are you calling master!?”

However, Theia was in a great mood despite her crushing defeat. It was as if she didn't care about the points anymore.

“It'll be too late when Satomi-san realizes it. I'll use my elegant techniques, my elegant techniques, and… and…”

Tears continued to stream down Yurika's cheeks.

It was hard to tell who came out on top when looking at the cheerful Theia and depressed Yurika.

“Satomi-kun.”

At that moment, Shizuka who had finished drinking her cup of tea called out to Koutarou.

“There's no need to be shy, I understand.”

“You bastard, just because the play is close, you're getting— Huh? Yes?”

Koutarou who was in the middle of speaking with Theia, turned his head towards Shizuka.

“Hey Koutarou, we're not done talking yet.”

“Ah, owowowow.”

Theia then grabbed Koutarou's head with both of her hands and forcibly turned it back to herself. Koutarou then let out a scream.

“A-Are you trying to twist my neck!?”

“Ah, sorry.”

However, once Koutarou screamed out in pain, Theia quickly let go. She didn't want to harm him. Since the date of the play was not far, she couldn't afford to let the Blue Knight's actor be harmed.

“…You look like you're having fun, Satomi-kun.”

“Ouch… it's not fun at all. So what is it, landlord-san?”

“Right, about that.”

Shizuka happily clapped her hands together, before spinning her finger around and began talking.

Everyone's Christmas Circumstances

“Satomi-kun, I heard you picked up another part-time job.”

“Eh? Why do you know that?”

“I heard from Mackenzie.”

“That bastard, saying something unnecessary…”

Koutarou recalled his meeting with Kenji and lightly clicked his tongue. Like Kenji had assumed, Koutarou had kept the extra part-time job a secret.

“Oh, a new part-time job, huh.”

“Is that why you've been getting home late, recently?”

“I can't believe you can do it in this cold…”

“I'll cheat, I'll definitely cheat…”

Having learned of Koutarou's new part-time job, the four invaders each show a different reaction. Kiriha seemingly happy as she sipped her tea, Theia nodded her head, Sanae was worried he might catch a cold in the cool winter weather and Yurika was still mumbling while facing the wall.

The four invaders each showed positive responses, but there was one person in room 106 that showed the opposite reaction.

“…”

“What's wrong, Ruth-san?”

“No, it's nothing.”

A deep wrinkle appeared on Ruth's forehead as she gave Koutarou a sharp glance. When Koutarou had asked what was wrong, Ruth had answered nothing and turned her head away, but Koutarou knew that wasn't true.

“So why did you start a new part-time job, Satomi-kun?”

When Shizuka asked that, the wrinkle on Ruth's forehead got even deeper.

“Why, well—”

“Is it so you can get some money for a Christmas date!?”

Unlike Shizuka, whose eyes were sparkling and full of curiosity, Ruth's expression was getting darker and darker.

What?

Koutarou looked at the two in confusion.

“Now that it's out, there's no point in hiding it.”

Kiriha, who had been listening in, grinned towards Koutarou. Her smile quickly changed into a more elegant one and she started speaking to Shizuka. Koutarou had a bad feeling about what was about to happen, but since he was too worried about Ruth, he didn't have a chance to stop her.

“Actually Shizuka, I and Koutarou have a date planned for Christmas.”

“I knew it!! So the person you were going on a date with was Kiriha!!”

At the same time Shizuka shouted out, the atmosphere in the room froze. The stares that were focused on Koutarou increased from one to four. The extra three stares came from Sanae, Yurika and Theia. The three of them put pressure on Koutarou by criticizing him at the same time.

Everyone's Christmas Circumstances

“Koutarou! I told you to keep away from Kiriha! She'll invade our room you know!”

Sanae assumed that Kiriha had seduced Koutarou to invade the room. She didn't expect Kiriha to actually fall in love with him. In other words, Sanae was desperate to save Koutarou from Kiriha's grasp.

“That's cheating! Two timing is an unforgivable sin!”

Yurika puffed up her cheeks like a balloon. She thought that Koutarou was having an affair with Kiriha. Koutarou already had Harumi, so him going on a date with Kiriha was an unforgivable betrayal. And since she imagined Koutarou, Harumi and herself going out on a date together, it wasn't just a betrayal against Harumi, but to Yurika herself as well.

“You fool! What kind of business have you gotten involved with this time!? Spit it out, Koutarou!! Who are you fighting against without even letting me know!?”

Unlike Sanae and Yurika, Theia was worried about something else. She was worried that someone other than Kiriha might cause Koutarou harm.

Theia had noticed the underground political problems around Kiriha. The battle the other day confirmed her suspicion. Although the problems the other day had been resolved by that fight, the root of the problem had remained unsolved.

Theia believed that Koutarou was more likely to have gotten involved in more of Kiriha's problems.

Why are you always like that!? You only need to protect me!

It was the knight-like behavior that Theia wanted: the courage to stand up against any enemy, unwilling to overlook any evil and unconditionally loving everyone. Those were the three virtues the legendary hero, Blue Knight was said to embody.

Theia had wished for those virtues to appear within Koutarou. Despite that, knowing that Koutarou might be in danger, Theia couldn't honestly rejoice. Joy and worry combined within her, creating a complex feeling.

“Kiriha-san, what are you saying all of a sudden!?”

Meanwhile, Koutarou himself loudly protested to Kiriha. He hadn't made any date plans with Kiriha.

“There's no need to be so cold, Koutarou. That other day you said you loved me.”

Kiriha looked at Koutarou with a sorrowful expression. For a moment, when their eyes met, the ends of her lips lifted up, making a mischievous smile. Kiriha was having fun cornering Koutarou.

“Oooh, well done, Satomi-kun!”

“Satomi-san!? Is that true!?”

“You're being tricked Koutarou! Keep it together!”

“Argh, this is getting nowhere! Tell me everything, no secrets!”

Kiriha's plan worked perfectly, and the girls in the room all believed her. Kiriha then continued to fan the flames.

“Koutarou promised me that we'd enjoy the Christmas on the surface with just the two of us.”

“What are you talking about!? Besides, you have someone you've decided—”

“Eii♪”

Everyone's Christmas Circumstances

Koutarou who was in a hurry to resolve the increasingly confusing situation opened his mouth to protest, and in that moment, Kiriha shoved a half-eaten Manjū she was holding into his mouth.

“Hmhmh, Mhmmm.”

“Is it good, Koutarou?”

Everyone's Christmas Circumstances

Everyone's Christmas Circumstances

Having succeeded in blocking Koutarou's mouth, Kiriha smiled brightly.

Kiriha's acting was flawless, and thanks to the series of events, they would have looked like lovers to anyone watching.

“…I'll have you explain in detail, Satomi-sama.”

Ruth spoke in a low, cold voice, and it was clear to everyone there that it was no act.

“I'm sorry, it was really a joke. In reality, I don't know why Koutarou picked up another part-time job either.”

The atmosphere in the room had cleared up thanks to Kiriha's explanation and apology. The sharpness of the glances directed at Koutarou softened up and the girls sighed.

“Geez… just give me a break…”

“Fufufu.”

Koutarou also let out a sigh of relief as the situation calmed down. Yet another smile appeared on Kiriha's smile as she saw Koutarou do that.

“That's boring.”

The only one not welcoming this situation was Shizuka, who had been enjoying all the commotion.

Having finally calmed down, Ruth blushed a little because of her misunderstanding before clearing her throat. She gathered herself and looked at Koutarou once more.

“So why did you start a new part-time job, Satomi-sama?”

“That's right, I want to know too.”

“Ah, that's because more money is needed around the end of the year.”

Koutarou quickly replied; that was what he was going to answer in the first place.

“The normal excavation job is on vacation during the end of the year, so I needed another part-time job in the meanwhile.”

“Money for living, huh? That's the most boring answer.”

Shizuka sighed with regret. Seeing that, Koutarou smiled wryly at her.

“I don't care if it's boring. My lifestyle is at stake here.”

“Satomi-kun, don't you want to enjoy your youth a bit more?”

“Who knows, that's…”

“Koutarou, if you'd like, I'll live up to your expectation.”

“Kiriha-san, you just be quiet!”

“Oh, scary.”

Koutarou gave Kiriha an angry stare, but she showed no signs of regret.

Really, becoming friends with her is a lot more troublesome…

While looking at Kiriha's strangely cute smile, Koutarou sighed in his mind.

“Hmm…”

Looking at Koutarou and Kiriha like that, Sanae reached a certain conclusion.

Kiriha isn't really planning on doing anything to Koutarou…

Everyone's Christmas Circumstances

The spiritual waves being emitted while Koutarou and Kiriha were talking were very similar to that of when Koutarou and Kenji were speaking. It wasn't just the spiritual waves, but also the meaning behind the words. So Sanae came to the conclusion that the relationship between the two had changed for the better.

Then leaving them be will be fine I guess. In fact…

Sanae began smiling like always and jumped onto Koutarou's back.

“Koutarou, you should enjoy your youth with me.”

“Really, what's that supposed to mean?”

“Don't worry about the small stuff♪”

As Sanae was clinging onto Koutarou's back, she felt like copying Kiriha.

“By the way, what is everyone doing on Christmas, or rather, during the winter vacation?”

With Sanae still on his back, Koutarou looked at each of the girls in the room.

“Training for the play, obviously. Of course, you will too.”

“Helping her highness, and training in martial arts.”

“Participating in the cosclub’s activities between the 29th and New Year's Eve.”

“I'll be doing the same as always. Ah, but I might go play with Yurika!”

“I was invited to the apartment union's end of the year party at New Year's Eve, and I'll be visiting the shrine during New Year's Day with some girls from the class.”

“I have to perform a ritual on the New Year's Eve and the New Year's Day.”

“…I see.”

Koutarou nodded after hearing everyone's plans.

So everyone's free at Christmas huh… In that case I better hide it well or this'll be a mess…

If it was revealed, there'd be nothing but trouble, so Koutarou decided to keep his secret hidden.

Having sensed Koutarou's strange feelings mixed into his spiritual waves, Sanae whispered into his ear with a confused expression.

“What about it?”

“No, it's nothing. Everyone was so interested in my Christmas, so I was just wondering what all of you had planned.”

“Hmm…”

Sanae quickly backed off. She just wondered what was going on, so she didn't pester Koutarou about it.

“So, Koutarou-”

“Yeah?”

Fortunately, no one else seemed to mind and the topic naturally changed.

The traditional swords for Forthorthe Knights' were smaller than a two-handed sword but larger than a one-handed sword. These were made as such so that when using a shield, it could be held in one hand, and without one, it could be held with two.

As they developed firearms and reached the modern age, two-handed swords fell out of use, and knives and one-handed swords became popular and were being produced the most.

Because of that, the only time one would see a traditional sword was in the hands of a noble who valued tradition, or a high-ranking officer wearing a formal uniform.

The treasured sword Saguratin in Koutarou's hands right now was one of those traditional swords.

“Theia, isn't this a bit too big to be used in one hand?”

“All I can say is that you'll get used to it. In the next play, you have to use a sword and shield simultaneously.”

“I'll give it a try, but don't expect too much.”

Right now, Koutarou was holding Saguratin in his right hand and a large shield in his left while wearing a replica of the Blue Knight's armor. His current appearance was based on the Blue Knight during the war.

He was having a hard time swinging his sword around in this outfit. Up until now, he had always used the sword with two hands, so this was the first time he had to use it with just one. Because of that, Koutarou's posture collapsed whenever he swung the heavy sword around. To Koutarou, it was like swinging a baseball bat with a single hand. However, the shield was required for the war scenes, so Theia had no choice but to rely on Koutarou's hard work.

“Your highness, should you really be concerned about the shield?”

Koutarou was having trouble using the shield and sword at the same time, so Ruth felt that forcing Koutarou to use the shield was unnecessary.

In reality, Koutarou's movements when holding the sword with both hands were very good. On top of Koutarou getting used to the sword, the power-assist function of the armor had started memorizing Koutarou's movements so he was moving much more sharply than during the last play.

In other words, ignoring the shield would allow Koutarou to perform better.

“…”

Theia took another look at Koutarou's appearance as he swung the sword around after Ruth pointed that out.

Ruth does have a point…

No one on Earth knew the first thing about Forthorthe's historical facts. Only Theia and Ruth knew that the Blue Knight used a sword and shield during the war, so there was no real point in being concerned about that. Having the Blue Knight, no, Koutarou wield a shield was mostly because of Theia's self-satisfaction.

But-

But even then, Theia wanted Koutarou to wield a shield. She wanted him to be able to do the same things the Blue Knight could.

“After all, I have high expectations of Koutarou.”

“In what?”

Responding to Theia, Ruth posed with her own sword and shield. Compared to her height, they were quite large, but she showed no signs of having any trouble wielding them.

The sword and shield that she was using were automated modern weapons created by advanced science, unlike Koutarou's. Because of that, even Ruth who wasn't that strong could fight at the same level as a normal soldier. Ruth was going to be Koutarou's practice partner.

“In his exemplary knightliness.”

“To become the Blue Knight?”

When Ruth asked Theia that question, she didn't respond right away.

Could it really…

At that moment, Theia was greatly shaken. She had always been training Koutarou to become the Blue Knight, but once Ruth had said it out loud, Theia noticed that she didn't actually feel that way, which came as a shock.

I don't want Koutarou to become the Blue Knight…?

She wanted him to be an exemplary knight. But she didn't want him to become the Blue Knight.

In other words…

“No. I want him to surpass the Blue Knight.”

“Fufu.”

Hearing Theia's words, Ruth smiled.

By the time you said that, Satomi-sama had already become a more important existence than the Blue Knight to us, your highness…

Having spent many years together with her like an older sister, Ruth could understand Theia.

Theia didn't want the Blue Knight to surpass himself. However, she did for Koutarou. No, more importantly, had Theia ever expected this much from anyone else in the past?

“If it's Satomi-sama, I'm sure he'll be able to.”

“Ruth… Why do you think so?”

Ruth smiled as Theia looked at her questioningly. She wanted to know the reason behind her belief that Koutarou could surpass the Blue Knight.

“That's because his title is not 'Blue Knight.’”

“Eh…?”

“There's no way that Satomi-sama would be inferior to the Blue Knight. That person is 'Theiamillis's Blue Knight' after all.”

Seeing Ruth declare that with a smile, Theia dropped her shoulders. And as if she had given up, the edge of her lips lifted and she smiled as well.

“…That's not logical, Knight of Pardomshiha.”

“I am aware. However, a knight's virtue is not governed by reason.”

Theia and Ruth laughed at each other after speaking formally to one another. However, the feelings in those words were those of sisters.

“Hey, Theia!”

At that moment, Koutarou who had been training on his own called out to Theia.

“I don't know why, but the armor's beeping and stuff! Something about the weight balance!”

“…Either way, we've got a long way to go.”

“Fufufu.”

Looking at Koutarou like that, Theia and Ruth laughed once more. As they did, Koutarou got impatient and called out to Theia again.

“Are you listening? Hey, Theia!”

“Then let's go.”

“As you wish, my princess.”

The two then walked towards Koutarou. Today’s training had only just begun.

Part 3

Koutarou's sword practice ended when midnight came closing in.

“Ruth, that's it for tonight.”

“It's still early though.”

“I don't mind. Let him sleep.”

The reason for that was that Koutarou had fallen asleep.

When they had taken a short break, Koutarou had sat down and then fallen asleep. In the past, Theia would have woken him up and continued, but today, she oddly enough stopped practice for the day.

“Is that alright?”

“Koutarou is stubborn. If we woke him up and asked, he'd say he was fine.”

Theia laughed quietly as she squatted down next to Koutarou and pressed the button to release the armor's equipment.

As she did, the sound of compressed air being released could be heard while Koutarou's armor loosened up. She believed that having the armor this way would be more comfortable to sleep.

Having confirmed that Koutarou was really asleep, she slowly got up and turned to Ruth.

“…But since he's fallen asleep like this, he must have been really tired. He must've tired himself out at that new part-time job.”

“That's true. I think so too.”

Theia and Ruth looked at the sleeping Koutarou.

“Our existence must be putting pressure on Koutarou's lifestyle. I can't find it in me to wake him up and tell him to continue with the practice.”

“I understand…”

As they looked at Koutarou, the two of them recalled the various memories they had made as they had lived on Earth.

To a normal boy like Koutarou, it can't have been an easy way of life. Having been thrown around by the whims of the invaders, he still managed to maintain his own lifestyle. Despite that, Koutarou was living up to Theia's and the others’ expectations.

“…You don't always have to live up to everyone's expectations, Koutarou…”

Theia looked at him with an apologetic expression, while at the same time feeling grateful.

Rest easy, my knight…

Theia smiled at the sleeping Koutarou. It was a gentle smile truly fitting of the word royal.

“Your highness… you've gotten more mature.”

“Eh?”

Surprised by those words, Theia looked suddenly at Ruth. As she did, Ruth smiled gently at her.

“I don't believe your highness had the luxury to do that when you first came to this planet.”

“…That's true.”

Back then, Theia's feelings to become the empress and protect her mother were so strong that she believed she didn't have the luxury to worry about other people's circumstances or feelings.

However, after she had come to Earth and met Koutarou and the others, she had gradually begun to change.

“Now I can tell. It was just as Koutarou said, I'm a useless princess. It's obvious that Koutarou wouldn't swear his loyalty to me.”

However, Theia was now different from before.

Her feelings of wanting to protect her mother hadn't changed from before; however, the best method to do that didn't have to entail becoming the empress.

Right now, rather than becoming the empress, Theia felt that it was more important to earn the loyalty of her citizens. Becoming the empress would just be an added bonus.

Ruth is saying that I've changed, but… would Koutarou swear loyalty to the current me…?

She could say it as a joke as often as she wanted, it would happen from time to time as they spent time together. But what would happen if she seriously asked him?

If she asked, Koutarou would probably answer. However, Theia didn't have the courage to do so yet. She stared at the sleeping Koutarou. She would ask when she had grown more mature, that's what she decided in her heart.

“I'm really glad we came to this planet.”

Having met Koutarou and the other invaders, Theia's growth; those bizarre coincidences had given birth to miracles.

“…Yeah…”

Theia and Ruth were grateful for those coincidences; alternatively, one might also call it fate.

The Job Hunting Battlefront and Feeling Like a Princess

Part 1

Wednesday, December 23

Koutarou who was reading the manuscript, reached the end of the page. As if waiting for him, the manuscript flipped the page on its own. It hadn't been moved by hand, nobody was touching it. It was almost as if the wind had flipped the page for him.

Despite that, Koutarou showed no signs of surprise. He just continued reading on the next page as if nothing had happened.

“Thanks.”

“Mm~”

As Koutarou said thanks, Sanae's voice could be heard from above. Sanae had used her powers as a ghost to flip the page of the manuscript. It was a very similar phenomenon to what occurred in horror movies when a page would flip itself.

“Oh.”

Shortly after having begun reading the next page, Koutarou stopped. Since the scene had ended, more than half of the page was blank.

It's almost time to go as well, so I guess I'll stop here.

Since it seemed like a good place to stop, Koutarou shut the manuscript. He then clasped his hands together and stretched them over his head.

“Hmm~~”

As he did, his joints could be heard cracking because he had been reading the manuscript in the same position the entire morning.

“Reading a book really makes my shoulders stiff.”

Having finished stretching, Koutarou grasped his shoulder with his hand; simply stretching would fix his stiff shoulders.

“Koutarou, I'll massage your shoulders.”

“Ah, please do.”

“Just leave it to Sanae-chan!”

Sanae floated down to Koutarou's back and began massaging his shoulders.

“Your shoulders are quite stiff!”

“Ah, that's good.”

“It's Sanae-chan's special spiritual massage after all♪”

Sanae used her poltergeist to roughly massage Koutarou's shoulders as she controlled the flow of the surrounding aura. She corrected or reinforced the disordered aura and improved his body's condition. It was a completely new kind of massaging method that would surprise even the professionals.

“You could make a living by doing this.”

“No way, I can only do this much for Koutarou. Other people would raise their guard, making it useless.”

“I don't really get it, but what a waste.”

The Job Hunting Battlefront and Feeling Like a Princess

“Hehe, praise me even more you bastard♪”

Since Sanae's massage was so skillful, Koutarou just left his body to her for a while. It felt like the iron buried in his shoulders melted away like ice.

“Sorry to have kept you waiting, Satomi-sama.”

At that moment, Ruth appeared from the glowing wall, wearing a gym outfit. She was going to go jogging to build up her physical strength.

“I'm off.”

“I'm leaving now.”

Koutarou and Ruth dashed out of the room. Both of them were wearing a gym outfit to go jogging. And since Koutarou was going to take part in the knitting society's club activities later, he was also carrying a bag with a change of clothes.

“…Take care.”

Theia saw the two of them off and her shoulders slightly dropped.

The Blue Knight is heading for the Silver Princess. Isn't that just natural…?

Theia tried to persuade herself like that as she noticed her own disappointment. Even though it was just an acting role, she didn't like her knight running towards another princess.

Koutarou would probably swear loyalty to the Silver Princess, no, to Sakuraba Harumi…

Theia began feeling like there was a large gap between her and Harumi.

Koutarou had respected and admired Harumi for a long time, but he hadn't for Theia. It was obvious who he felt was more noble.

In the end, I'm lacking when it comes to a princess's true nature…

Theia closed the door, not sure how to feel as Koutarou and Ruth disappeared from her sight.

If I and Sakuraba Harumi fought over who would make Koutarou their vassal-

A dark feeling expanded throughout her chest as she imagined that.

I can't beat Sakuraba Harumi. There's no way I'd win with the way I am right now…

Having been left behind in the room, Theia felt a sense of defeat for the first time.

Koutarou and Ruth were running side by side on a road that led to the high school.

Ruth who wanted to jog and Koutarou who wanted to go to school for club activities could both achieve their goals by jogging to school.

Since he was matching his pace to Ruth's, Koutarou was running slower than he would have on his own. Ruth's steps were shorter, and she had less muscles. First up, she had to build her muscles. Her martial arts training was still at the starting line.

Since it was the middle of the day during the winter vacation, there was no one on the road leading to the school. The already cold winter road looked even lonelier with just two people running on it. However, the two runners were completely unrelated to loneliness.

“I'm sorry for wasting your time, Satomi-sama.”

“No worries, you're always taking care of me, Ruth-san.”

Ruth looked apologetically at Koutarou while running. However, Koutarou shook his head and smiled.

“You're always doing all the housework, so I felt a little guilty. So don't worry about something like this.”

“Thank you, Satomi-sama.”

Ruth cheerfully nodded. Because of her mood, her steps naturally turned lighter. However, Ruth began feeling a certain doubt.

But still, why do I have to get stronger? Now that I think about it, I feel like there's no need for it…

Up until now, Ruth had an urge to get stronger that drove her. As she ran alongside Koutarou, she couldn't feel that urge anymore whatsoever. But at the same time, she didn't want to stop running; she felt like going on forever. Ruth couldn't help but feel that that was mysterious.

But at the same time, I'm her highness's protection officer. The stronger I get, the safer her highness will be!

In the end, Ruth decided to get stronger. She had doubts about her feelings, but the stronger she was able to become, the safer Theia would be. If anything, staying weak would be bad.

“I hope I can become strong enough to protect her highness.”

“Theia's already stupidly strong, is there anyone reason to protect her?”

Koutarou smiled wryly at Ruth.

To him, Theia wasn't a weak person that had to be protected. Having been helped by her so many times now, he thought of her as a reliable person.

“Fufufu, Satomi-sama, if you took the weapons away from her highness, she would just be a girl.”

“She's strong in a fist fight too though.”

Koutarou continued to smile wryly while rubbing his chin. He had his chin punched by Theia just the other day. Koutarou had gotten into a lot of fist fights with Theia, so he knew just how strong she was.

Theia moved about lightly despite packing a powerful punch. She also had a good intuition when it came to fighting. He couldn't think of her as just a girl, as Ruth had put it.

“Fufufu, however Satomi-sama, there's not only going to be one enemy.”

“Ah, that's true. I just tend to forget that she's a princess.”

At that moment, Koutarou remembered just who Theia was.

Even if she's fine now, once she returns to her country, she'll be surrounded by enemies, huh…

She was the princess of an empire that ruled a galaxy. She had a lot of political adversaries and was always in danger. There were also radicals that opposed the government on top of the rivals competing for the emperor's throne. Additionally, Theia's mother, Elfaria, had poor relations with the military, and a suspicious atmosphere could be felt between them.

Her current life on Earth was an exception, but normally, she was a girl that lived in that kind of world.

“Yes. Once her highness returns home, she will return to a far more dangerous life than this.”

Ruth's expression turned severe in an instant. Seeing that expression, Koutarou felt like that life was far harsher than he had imagined.

So that's why she wants to protect her and get stronger… Rather than wanting to deal with the actual danger, she wants Theia to feel safe…

Koutarou could faintly understand Ruth's feelings. As he looked into the winter sky, he wanted to be of her help.

“I have something I want to ask you, Satomi-sama.”

“Yes?”

When Koutarou looked down from the sky and onto Ruth, he saw that she had a serious expression on her face.

I guess it must be serious…?

Sensing her seriousness, Koutarou stopped jogging. Ruth did the same.

They looked at each other while on the road leading to school.

“Satomi-sama, this is not her highness's will. I'm telling you this from my own initiative, so I want you to keep it secret from her highness for a while.”

Ruth started up by saying that. She had been thinking about it up until now, so neither her words nor expression showed any hesitation.

“Satomi-sama, I don't mind if you don't do it right away, but regardless of whether her highness seizes room 106 or not, would you please serve her highness?”

“Eh…”

Ruth's offer surprised Koutarou. Not really understanding what she meant, Koutarou asked her.

“What do you mean by serving Theia…?”

If Theia gained control of room 106, Koutarou knew that Theia needed to make him her vassal. Ruling a location and its inhabitants was Theia's trial.

However, Ruth wanted Koutarou to serve Theia whether she won or not. Koutarou couldn't understand the meaning behind that.

“Yes. Like I said before, her highness has a lot of enemies, and has no time to let her guard down. She never knows when the people she considers her allies will betray her.”

Ruth stared right into Koutarou's eyes as she explained the circumstances. A strong wish and deep trust shone inside those eyes.

“She also can't easily trust people offering help. That's because she doesn't know what organization would be behind them.”

This consultation with Koutarou wasn't just important for Theia, but for Ruth herself as well. She continued talking as if praying.

“However, Satomi-sama, you are different.”

“Me?”

“Yes. Satomi-sama, you have no relation with Forthorthe. There is absolutely no organization behind you. And I am well aware of what kind of person you are.”

Having heard that much, Koutarou began understand what this was about.

Now that I think about it, Ruth mentioned something like this before…

According to Koutarou's memories, just before they all went to the beach, Ruth had explained Theia's circumstances.

The Job Hunting Battlefront and Feeling Like a Princess

Because of political reasons, and because of her title and position as a princess, she had a hard time making companions. However, she had come to Earth and met Koutarou, who had absolutely no connection to Forthorthe. Thanks to that, Theia was able to make her first friend, someone she could yell at that would yell right back at her.

And this time was the same.

Koutarou had no connection to Forthorthe, and as a friend they could trust him. Having determined that, Ruth asked Koutarou to serve Theia.

“And that's why you asked me?”

“Yes. Please, by any means. Regardless of if her highness becomes the empress or not, she needs an ally she can trust, a knight.”

Regardless of if Theia became the empress, whether she remained a princess or not, she would still have a lot of enemies. So regardless of what happened to Theia in the future, Ruth, who was concerned with her safety, wanted Koutarou to come to her side.

“But Ruth, I'm an alien, or rather a human from a different star. I don't think that would be possible!”

Koutarou was well aware of how important Ruth's offer was. It was on a completely different level than becoming a decorative vassal for the sake of a trial. Because of that, Koutarou was shocked; this was something he couldn't easily decide on.

“That is not a problem. A long time has passed since Forthorthe stepped into the galaxy. There are already several examples of humans from different planets becoming nobles.”

Having seemingly expected that response, Ruth answered his hesitation without missing a beat. However, Koutarou replied with even more fervor.

“Despite that, I have neither status nor authority here! I can't see how I could be of any help!”

Seeing that reaction, Ruth was convinced that she had not made the wrong judgment.

By the time you're worrying about stuff like that, we have no other option than to make you an ally, Satomi-sama…

Ruth smiled slightly and answered Koutarou.

“If this is about status or authority, her highness already has it. And if you insist, I won't mind if you join the Pardomshiha family.”

Theia could give Koutarou both status and authority. If he needed a historical backing, he could be adopted into the Pardomshiha family.

Ruth wasn't asking Koutarou for something like that.

“What we need is neither status nor authority. What we need is you personally, Satomi-sama.”

Ruth was asking for Koutarou himself.

That might be a sincere wish that rivaled a declaration of love.

Part 2

Koutarou walked towards the club building inside Harukaze high school, scratching his head while thinking.

“Become Theia's vassal, her knight, huh…”

He had parted ways with Ruth at the entrance to the school, and she was no longer anywhere to be seen. However, Koutarou's head was still filled with the words she had said.

She wanted Koutarou to serve Theia regardless of whether Theia gained control of the room or not.

Ruth's suggestion was simple, but Koutarou wasn't sure how to feel.

“That's just unreasonable, Ruth-san…”

Koutarou sighed repeatedly.

Becoming Theia's vassal meant traveling to Forthorthe, leaving Earth and abandoning his current life.

So Koutarou couldn't give an answer right away. Fortunately, Ruth understood that and didn't mind waiting for Koutarou's answer until rulership of room 106 had been determined.

“If it was just to become Theia's vassal it wouldn't be that hard… but if I have to leave Earth…”

Koutarou didn't have as much resistance in becoming Theia's vassal now compared to when they had first met. Theia had saved him several times, and he knew that behind her stubborn mask, she was really lonely and gentle. Both Koutarou and Theia had grown, and their relationship had greatly changed.

So if it was just becoming Theia's vassal, Koutarou felt that would be fine. Koutarou was stubborn himself so he had a problem saying that to her face, but he didn't really mind becoming her vassal.

The reason why he hadn't already was because he knew about Kiriha's situation. If Koutarou become her vassal, the current power balance in room 106 would swing around. And if Theia were to win, things might develop the way Kiriha feared. That had to be avoided no matter what.

One more thing that served to slow down Koutarou, and that was what would happen after he became Theia's vassal. Theia would eventually return to Forthorthe. When that happened, as a vassal, he had to accompany her back. If he left Earth, he would no longer be an earthling, but rather a citizen of Forthorthe. Koutarou was attached to his current lifestyle, so he couldn't quite make a decision.

He didn't dislike the idea of becoming Theia's vassal. He also knew about her hardships and enemies. But he couldn't allow for Kiriha to lose right now. He was also attached to his life on Earth. Those thoughts kept swirling around Koutarou's head, and pretty soon, he was about to overheat.

“Ahhh~, I give up!!”

Having reached his limit, Koutarou gave up on thinking. There was no need to reach a decision right now anyway. Ruth had said the same.

Either way, I feel like something's missing…

That's what Koutarou concluded as he walked towards the club building.

Whether he became a vassal or not, regardless of what he decided, he wanted at least one more clear reason. Right now, the scale in Koutarou's head was balanced with Kiriha on one side and

Theia on the other. If he had a reason that would make the balance shift in one's favor, Koutarou would be able to make his decision.

“Knitting, knitting.”

Koutarou stopped in place and shook his head to switch up. From now he would be participating in the knitting society's club activities. He couldn't keep worrying about what his decision would be.

“I wouldn't want to make Sakuraba-senpai worry by having a serious expression on my face.”

Having changed gears, Koutarou began walking again. As he did, he could suddenly feel someone's glance on him. It was a glance that made him feel shivers run down his spine.

“What?”

Koutarou looked around for the owner of that glance, but he couldn't see anyone. Since the area around the club building was open, if anyone was around he would be able spot them immediately. But Koutarou couldn't find anyone.

“…Am I just being too self-conscious?”

Koutarou assumed it was just his imagination and entered the club building.

Harumi seemed happy despite her concerned look as she received the manuscript.

“Thank you, Satomi-kun.”

She then began flipping through the pages of the manuscript. To Koutarou, it looked like she was pleased with it.

“Satomi-kun, it might be a bit sudden, but can we practice our lines now?”

“Sakuraba-senpai, I understand that you're happy, but we have club activities to do.”

“Ah, r-right, sorry Satomi-kun.”

Harumi's face turned red when Koutarou pointed that out. She hurriedly closed the manuscript and picked up her knitting needles on top of a nearby desk.

The knitting society had planned club activities today. Besides, they had only received permission to use the club room because of that. Koutarou also wanted to practice for the play, but just stopping club activities all together would be problematic.

If we begin practicing now, there'll be trouble tomorrow…

Koutarou then began moving his own knitting needles and called out to the panicking Harumi.

“I'll be your practice partner all you want later.”

“…Satomi-kun, you meanie.”

Harumi, still blushing, snuck a peek of Koutarou to determine his expression and quickly went back to looking at the knitting in her hands.

“Even if you say that, there are preparations to be made for tomorrow.”

“I-I know, you're a bully after all…”

Harumi moved her knitting needles with her face still red. Harumi's expression and tone of voice seemed displeased, but in reality it was the opposite. In fact, she welcomed this situation.

Lately I've gotten better at speaking with Satomi-kun…

Harumi stopped for an instant to steal a peek at Koutarou again. He was cheerfully moving his own knitting needles, still smiling while chatting with Harumi.

The Job Hunting Battlefront and Feeling Like a Princess

Harumi felt lonely when Koutarou had only treated her as a respectable senior. So to her, having Koutarou being mean from time to time was a cheerful happening.

This is all thanks to Nijino-san… But this is still nothing compared to Theiamillis-san…

Harumi's ideal relationship with Koutarou was the one he had with Theia.

They would talk to each other without holding back, and from time to time they would fight, but they would always seem energetic and cheerful.

The true way of treasuring someone was not treating them like a princess or a customer. It was showing each other their good and bad parts without holding back. That's how Koutarou felt.

That's why Harumi was jealous of Theia. The only other person that Koutarou was that open with was Kenji.

I'd like us to be like that someday too… and someday…

Harumi's face suddenly turned beet red. She got embarrassed when imagining her ideal future with Koutarou. She then hurriedly moved her knitting needles, trying to remove the embarrassing thoughts from her mind through knitting.

“That's right, about tomorrow.”

“Kyaaa!?”

When Koutarou called out to Harumi, she let out a surprised scream.

“What's wrong, senpai?”

“I-It's nothing, nothing at all.”

Harumi's face that shook side to side was redder than ever. It was about as red as a tomato or apple.

“Really? Well anyways, about tomorrow—”

Koutarou didn't really mind and continued to talk. Meanwhile, Harumi was desperately trying to calm down. Because of that, she moved her knitting needles even faster.

“Are you ready for tomorrow?”

“I-It's fine, it will be my first time spending Christmas like that, so I'm wondering what to wear, but all the other preparations are ready.”

“I see. I'm prepared as well. I had a hard time finding something that would fit your tastes though, senpai.”

“I-I'll make sure not to be late tomorrow.”

Part 3

Koutarou was holding a metallic card with his fingertips. It was the trading card he had gotten the other day when he had gone to the amusement park with Kiriha. Koutarou himself didn't have any strong feelings about the card, but he knew that Kiriha had precious memories regarding this card, so he couldn't find it in him to get rid of it.

“S-Satomi-kun, do you have a moment?”

“Yes.”

When Harumi called for him, he placed the card between the pages of the manuscript and closed it. He was currently using the card as a bookmark.

Having finished their club activities for the time being, Koutarou and Harumi began practicing for the play. That said, they had only gotten their manuscripts today and yesterday, so the most they could do was check their scenes and lines.

“About this final parting scene—”

“S-Sakuraba-senpai, what's wrong!? Are you hurting somewhere?”

But the moment Koutarou saw Harumi's face, he was so surprised that he stood up. Tears were flowing out from her eyes.

“Ah, s-sorry, it's not like that. It was just such a good story that tears suddenly came pouring out…”

Harumi smiled at Koutarou while wiping tears from her eyes. Harumi found the contents of the manuscript to be very moving and tears just came flowing out.

Having realized his misunderstanding, Koutarou took a sigh of relief while smiling wryly and sat back down on his seat. He then opened the final page of the manuscript.

She must have really liked it. No, Sakuraba-senpai is just gentle, so that might be why…

The story ends with the Blue Knight and Silver Princess parting ways. That scene seemed to make Harumi very emotional, and her tears wouldn't stop flowing. Seeing that, Koutarou felt like that was very much like her.

“I'm sorry for crying all of a sudden…”

“Hahaha, it's fine, don't worry about it. So what part of this story did you like?”

Koutarou wanted his best performance to be the part of the story that made Harumi cry. So he wanted to confirm that.

“That's…”

Harumi flipped through the pages of the manuscript while smiling and crying.

“The Silver Princess's feelings being conveyed throughout the story.”

She then stroked the Silver Princess's lines in the manuscript. Her stroking and glance were both gentle.

“The sorrowful and impatient feelings of not being able to confess her love. The Silver Princess would give her life for the Blue Knight, but their positions got in the way and she was unable to convey her feelings. That really struck a chord with me…”

Harumi slowly closed her eyes and put her hand on her chest as she said that.

“If I were to pick a scene, it would probably the very last parting scene.”

“I thought so.”

Koutarou nodded as she mentioned the last scene.

It's hard to believe that Theia wrote this last scene…

The Silver Princess's and Blue Knight's love ends without budding. This wasn't just Theia's writing, but a historical fact.

There was too large of a gap in position between the next empress, the Silver Princess and a local knight like the Blue Knight. Regardless of how much the Blue Knight had done, it wouldn't be enough to close that large gap. So if the Blue Knight were to gain a high position through marriage all of a sudden, the aristocracy made unstable by the war would be sure to protest. That was a risk that couldn't be taken.

On top of that, Forthorthe still wasn't ruling the entire planet, so even if their positions didn't get in the way, it was impossible for the two of them to marry. Marriage was another of the cards used in politics with another country.

Because of that, the Blue Knight left before any problems arose. It was said that he simply returned to his hometown, but it was also theorized by historians that he had also left because of political reasons.

“Satomi-kun, if the person you loved was someone out your reach, what would you do?”

Harumi wiped her tears again. This time her tears were finally wiped away.

“I…”

Koutarou began thinking.

If I was in the Blue Knight's position and I fell in love with the Silver Princess…

However, it was a completely different life from his current one, so he had problems imagining it.

“I don't know. I guess I wouldn't know until that situation actually happens… Love that crosses status, huh… I wonder…”

Koutarou tilted his head from side to side. He couldn't imagine how the Blue Knight must have felt.

It would probably be bad if I can't at least somewhat imagine how it must feel before the play…

Koutarou dropped his shoulders and smiled wryly at his own immaturity.

“I see…”

Harumi however, smiled as she saw that.

I'm glad I have the same status as Koutarou…

Harumi understood the Silver Princess's feelings very well. So she was relieved that she and Koutarou were just normal high school students.

“What about you, Sakuraba-senpai?”

“I… I feel like it would be hard to convey my feelings.”

Harumi had already reached her answer, but like the Silver Princess, she couldn't tell him.

If both I and Theiamillis-san confessed to Satomi-kun at the same time, Satomi-kun would definitely pick Theiamillis-san. I can't win…

Harumi's complex was that she felt like she was no match for Theia.

“That's just like you, Sakuraba-senpai.”

Koutarou smiled as he heard Harumi's answer. It was an answer the suited the shy and modest Harumi.

“But I think that won't do.”

However, when she compared herself to the Silver Princess, Harumi felt like she shouldn't give up just yet.

I can't give up. It's not like the Silver Princess where there are a lot of obstacles…

She didn't have to worry about difference in status, consideration for the aristocrats or politics with other countries. The only thing that hadn't reached Koutarou was her feelings.

“Sakuraba-senpai…”

Hearing Harumi say that not being able to convey her feelings won't do came as a surprise to Koutarou. As she said that, her strong will could be seen in her eyes.

Sakuraba-senpai really is strong… She's just like a real princess…

Seeing that, Koutarou once again felt like it wasn't a mistake recommending Harumi as the princess lead.

“So you would confess?”

“Yes. It might be impossible right away, but eventually for sure.”

Harumi looked Koutarou right in the eyes and nodded.

No matter how many years it takes, or how big distance there might be between us, one day I'll…

That strong desire was the large difference between the girl in the manuscript and Harumi.

The Job Hunting Battlefront and Feeling Like a Princess

Part 4

As Koutarou got off the bus, Harumi, who had gotten off first, greeted him with a smile.

“I don't think it's good for a knight to keep his princess waiting.”

“That is because her highness is the only one with a commuter’s pass.”

In Kitsushouharukaze City, passengers paid when they stepped off the bus. Because of that, it took some time for Koutarou who normally didn't take the bus to get off, unlike Harumi who had a commuter’s pass.

“Stopat.”

“What's that supposed to mean?”

“Fufufu.”

“Ahaha.”

The two laughed together as they walked side by side away from the bus station. Their destination was the arcade in the shopping mall that they could now see. Because it was starting to grow dark, the light there shone gorgeously.

Having finished the club activities and practice for the play, they had gone to the station together. Koutarou had his part-time job to hand out flyers, and Harumi had to buy something in the mall. And in Harumi's case, this was the normal route she took when going home.

“It looks like it'll get cold tonight… Your job must be hard.”

The sun was still up, but the wind was cold. Having entered the late half of December, winter had now properly begun. So Harumi was worried about Koutarou who was about to work alone.

Harumi's body shook slightly as she looked up towards the sky. The setting sun in the cold winter sky always seemed melancholic to her.

“This is the last day, so I'll go all out.”

However, Koutarou had nothing to do with that kind of emotion and instead pumped himself up.

Today was December 23rd. This would be the last day he would be handing out flyers, since this was the last day the bakery he was working at accepted reservations for Christmas cakes. The cold might be harsh, as Harumi had said, but Koutarou motivated himself by remembering that it was the last day.

“Satomi-kun, please worry about your body a little.”

Harumi smiled wryly. She was half amazed and half impressed at Koutarou.

Satomi-kun is always so reckless…

Koutarou would often do reckless things, Harumi recalled memories of examples in the past.

During the sports festival he carried me while jumping. During the culture festival he made me play the heroine role in a play all of a sudden…

Harumi had plenty of memories with Koutarou. Memories popped into her head as if they were emerging from a spring.

The same was true when we were being chased by the coup d'état army. Even though I tried everything I could to stop him, he went ahead on his own. And when the magicians summoned a dragon, I begged him not to come, but in the end he came anyways…

The Job Hunting Battlefront and Feeling Like a Princess

In the forest along the border, Koutarou had stayed behind to fight the coup d'état army to let Harumi and the others run away. When the magicians had summoned a strange monster, he had stood in its way without fear.

“Satomi-kun is always so reck— wait, huh?”

That's where Harumi stopped up.

“When we were chased by coup d'état army…? Dragon…?”

Harumi was confused by the memories that had popped into her head. Of course, something like that had never happened in her life.

This won't do. I'm getting too absorbed with the character in a play…

The memories she was recalling were very similar to the scenes in 'The Silver Princess and the Blue Knight.’ So Harumi quickly determined that she was too absorbed with her character.

“Fufu, fufufu.”

“What's the matter, Sakuraba-senpai?”

Koutarou had a confused expression on his face as he looked at Harumi who all of a sudden began laughing. Harumi responded to Koutarou's question while laughing.

“I-It's just, I found myself feeling like a princess too funny. Fufu, Fufufufu, it seems like I've gotten too into my character.”

“Regarding the play, I should probably do the same.”

“You can't. If we both become like that, it would be strange. Fufu, fufufufu.”

“Hahaha, that's true. They'll think we're some strange society. Hahaha.”

Koutarou's and Harumi's cheerful laughter rang out and Harumi began walking again. And once she reached Koutarou, they began walking side by side again.

“That's right, Satomi-kun. Should I help you with the part-time job like yesterday?”

“I can't have that. I can't let someone feeling like a princess help out.”

“…You cheapskate, Satomi-kun.”

“It's just as you say, my princess.”

“Geez.”

In contrast to the bright atmosphere surrounding the two, their surroundings started to turn dark.

In reality, a sword shaped crest had been on Harumi's forehead ever since she got off the bus. And the crest was now blinking as it disappeared.

If their surrounding had been brighter, Koutarou might have noticed it. However, since it was so dim, Koutarou didn't notice it at all.

Part 5

“Achoo.”

Koutarou stopped handing out flyers to sneeze. It was now past eight in the evening and the shopping mall was getting colder. Koutarou felt much warmer when he was with Harumi.

“I wonder if it was a good idea to turn her down…”

Koutarou wiped his nose with a tissue as he felt like that.

Harumi had offered to help hand out flyers like yesterday, but Koutarou had declined and sent her home. When she had helped yesterday, she had only joined in for the last spurt. If she had helped out from the start, she would have worked for a longer time. And since Harumi had a weak constitution, Koutarou would never accept that.

“If Sakuraba-senpai helped me out from the start, I'd have to give you the pay.”

“Can't you just treat it like repaying you for everything you've helped me with?”

“No can do. Besides, don't you have something to do, senpai?”

“Can't you please find a way?”

“I can't. Tomorrow is more important.”

Harumi protested, but once tomorrow was mentioned, she reluctantly backed down. Tomorrow's preparations were important too.

“Senpai's been a lot more energetic lately, but this might be too much.”

Koutarou began handing out flyers again. Even as he did, the cold chilled his body more and more. His sigh of relief after sending Harumi home came out as white mist.

“How about a cake for Christmas!? At the Harukaze Bakery, we're accepting reservations for Christmas cakes! Today will be the last day for reservations!”

The temperature was going to drop even further, and there were still plenty of flyers to hand out. Koutarou's last job for the year was his harshest.

About an hour later, when the clock had passed 9PM, Sanae's voice, or more accurately her spiritual wave, rang out through the shopping mall.

“Ah, there he is! Found Koutarou!”

Sanae raised her voice because she had found Koutarou. Sanae was skilled when it came to finding Koutarou, since she was always clinging onto him, making her extra sensitive to his spiritual waves.

“Where?”

“There, under that light.”

“Ah… What's with that ridiculous outfit?”

Guided by Sanae, Theia spotted Koutarou. However, the moment she saw him she frowned.

“Your highness, that's an outfit to imitate Santa Claus. It's a kind of fairy that hands out presents to children around this time of the year.”

“Oh, so that flashiness is because it's based on fantasy?”

Ruth could be seen next to Theia. It seemed like they were interested in the Santa outfit that Koutarou was wearing and stared at it, side by side.

And behind those two were Yurika and Kiriha.

The Job Hunting Battlefront and Feeling Like a Princess

“Brrr, let's hurry on home, and away from this cold.”

Yurika's nose was running as she shook in the cold. Despite wearing more clothes than anyone else, she seemed to be the one suffering from the cold the most.

“Fufu, Yurika, aren't you the one that said that we should go meet up with Koutarou?”

Kiriha was the opposite of Yurika; despite being lightly dressed, she showed no signs of freezing. She looked just the same as she did in room 106.

“But I didn't think it would be this cold.”

“…You really don't have any guts.”

“I won't get any warmer with guts.”

“But Koutarou seems pretty fine.”

“Satomi-sama is overflowing with guts after all.”

“Even if you say that, it's not like it's not cold. Let's hurry.”

Following Kiriha's lead, the residents of room 106 approached Koutarou.

In reality, the five girls were all worried about Koutarou working in this cold, so they came to check up on him.

The reason for that was a mail Yurika received from Harumi around 9 o'clock when they were watching the news. In it, Harumi was worried about Koutarou working out in this cold. At the same time, the news was reporting that this would be the coldest day in Kitsushouharukaze City this year. Because of that, the girls got worried for Koutarou and came all this way.

“How about a cake for Christmas!? At the Harukaze Bakery, we're accepting reservations for Christmas cakes! Today will be the last day for reservations!”

By the time he was almost done, he only had about six flyers left. Since the bakery was only open until 10PM, he seemed confident that he would be able to finish up before it closed.

“Thank you. Please reserve your Christmas cake at Harukaze Bakery.”

Koutarou raised his voice as he handed out a flyer to couple with a child. That was thanks to the child having an interest in Koutarou's outfit.

“Goodbye, Santa, please give me lots of presents!”

“If you're a good boy I'll bring as many as you want. See you later.”

The child waved his hand at Koutarou as he was walking away. Koutarou quickly waved back, as he did, the parents smiled and bowed while holding their child’s hand and walking away.

“Fufu, I remember being the same once.”

Koutarou looked at the couple and their child as they walked away.

The child was holding onto the flyer Koutarou had given him and was talking to his parents about something. He still believed that Santa was real. Koutarou warmed up when he looked at the parents and their child and recalled the same happening to him.

“Oh, you have a surprisingly cute side to you.”

“Woah!? K-Kiriha-san!?”

Koutarou was surprised by Kiriha suddenly whispering into his ear and her having heard him talking to himself.

“It's not just Kiriha.”

“Eh?”

As he turned towards Sanae's voice, he could see five girls: Kiriha, Sanae, Theia, Ruth and Yurika. The residents of room 106 were all gathered there.

“What's up, coming all together like that?”

“We heard on the TV that tonight would be really cold, so we came to check up on you.”

Theia answered Koutarou's question. She pointed at the tip of Koutarou's nose and stared right at him.

“On me?”

“Would you rather we didn't?”

Kiriha smiled at Koutarou as he showed an amazed expression.

“No, that's not true.”

As he saw her smile, he realized it wasn't something to be so surprised about.

He had been getting along with Sanae ever since the ceasefire. Yurika was a little unreliable, but he thought she was fun to be around. Kiriha had only shown Koutarou her true colors, so they had been getting along much better ever since. They could pretty much be called best friends. As for Theia, he felt like she had gotten a lot more mature compared to when they first met. Thanks to that, their relationship was improving. And Ruth trusted Koutarou so much that she had even asked him to serve Theia together.

That's right, there's no need to be surprised that they come to check up on me. But that means…

But it not being something to be surprised about meant that he had new things to be surprised about.

He wanted Sanae to remain in the room so she could wait for her parents. If Kiriha were to lose, war might break out, and he wanted to help her find her crush. He didn't mind cooperating with Theia regarding her trial. And he didn't want to betray Ruth's trust. As for Yurika, he would often be moved by the sincere expressions she would show from time to time. She got serious more often and she was both Koutarou and Harumi's friend. Her extraordinary hobby alone wasn't a reason to chase her out.

I don't feel like chasing any of them out of room 106…!

The new surprise was that he was now longer against their invasion.

At the start, Koutarou fought against all of the girls intentions, but before he knew it, he had begun feeling the opposite. He had begun feeling that he wanted all of their invasions to succeed.

They've invaded even my heart…

Currently, if the battle was settled, the war that Kiriha feared might break out. As a princess, Theia wanted to win fair and square. Ruth wanted to battle to continue for a while so Theia could live peacefully. If the invaders were to vanish, Sanae would probably feel lonely. And he wanted Yurika to live as she wanted.

Because of those various reasons, Koutarou wanted the battle to continue. It wasn't just for his own sake, but to protect the surface, and for the invaders as well.

That's why I'm doing this job too…

Though he was hesitant about his own change, he didn't think it was wrong. That's because the girls had all come to pick him up.

“One, two, three, four, five. There are five flyers left!”

The Job Hunting Battlefront and Feeling Like a Princess

“Then if we take one each, the job will be done.”

“L-Let's hurry home, Satomi-san! There's no need to be out in this cold!”

“Alright, let's go home and get started on your practice!”

“Your highness, before that, Satomi-sama should take a bath and eat dinner.”

And he believed that the five girls had begun feeling that they were all necessary to one another.

Having finished handing out his flyers, Sanae jumped onto Koutarou's back as always as the six of them were heading home.

“Ah, Koutarou, your body is so cold!”

And as soon as she did, Sanae was so surprised she let go of him for a moment.

“Really?”

“Yes really!! At this rate you're going to catch a cold!”

Because Koutarou's body temperature had gradually dropped as he was working, he only felt like it was cold outside. But Sanae could tell what state Koutarou's body was in through spiritual power, and so she was surprised by how cold he was.

“It's fine, I have confidence in my body.”

“Shut it, you. You could at least wear some more clothes.”

While complaining, Sanae put her palms on his back. She was planning on warming his body up by manipulating his blood vessels similar to when she had given him a massage.

“What!?”

When Theia heard what Sanae said, she snatched up Koutarou's hands and held them in her own.

“I-It's true! You fool, what were you doing to get this cold!?”

“I was working, obviously.”

“That's not what I meant!?”

Theia glared at Koutarou and exhaled into his hands. She was trying to warm up Koutarou like Sanae was.

“Ah…”

Seeing Theia do that, Sanae stopped. She let go of his back and stared at her palms and showed a very lonely expression.

I'm envious of Theia… I can't do that…

Sanae stared through her somewhat translucent hands. That was because she was a ghost without a body. She would often hang onto Koutarou, but in reality, she couldn't directly touch him. Although she knew what it felt for her spiritual body to touch him, she didn't get the same sensation as touching him directly.

“Seriously… what are you going to do if you catch a cold and you fall behind on the practice!?”

“…Could you at least be worried about me?”

“I am. You're my important lead after all.”

“That's called being worried about the play!”

“Don't worry. If you catch a cold, I'll spend all night nursing you back to health. Fortunately we have tomorrow off, so I'll treat you lovingly and—”

“Don't lie with a straight face, Kiriha-san! If you don't stop I'll take you seriously you bastard!”

“You've been getting cold lately, Koutarou. Hah… In the past, your reactions were more lively…”

“Of course! I won't be tricked by you anymore!”

“Ruth, help us out. Take the clothes off of Yurika and wrap Koutarou up.”

“As you wish, my princess.”

“Kyaaaaaa!! Nooooo!!”

On the other side of Sanae's translucent palms, Koutarou and the four girls were making a fuss.

It's not just Theia… everyone can do that…

Touching, Grabbing, Shaking.

Everyone was doing it like it was natural. However, Sanae couldn't. If she tried to touch anyone, she would just pass right through. If she possessed someone, she could feel the sensation of touch, but she wasn't the one touching.

A ghost, huh… I really am a ghost…

Sanae finally remembered that she was completely different from the other girls.

Christmas Eve

Part 1

Thursday, December 24

Having changed into his gym outfit, Koutarou returned to his room. Inside was Ruth, also wearing a gym outfit, preparing to go out jogging.

“Hmm, so you started out by jogging.”

On top of the invaders, Shizuka was also inside the room. She was drinking tea that Ruth had just poured up for her, and called out to Koutarou and Ruth.

“Yes. According to Satomi-sama, I lack the basic physical strength I require.”

“That's true. If you're going to punch and kick you'll need at least a certain level of muscle development.”

“I'm afraid so.”

“There's no need to feel bad. Everyone is normally like that.”

“That's right. If you just keep at it you can do it.”

Ruth grieved her lack of physical strength with an embarrassed expression while Koutarou and Shizuka gave her words of encouragement.

If anything, Ruth-san has all the knowledge, and she's that strong without the muscles…

Since Shizuka had felt Ruth's hidden strength first hand, her words of encouragement didn't contain a single lie. In fact a chill ran down her spine when she imagined Ruth after having gained muscles.

“Koutarou, when are you getting home today? I was wondering when we should start our practice.”

“Ah, about that, but today's no good.”

“No good? Why? Do you have some other business?”

Having responded that he won't be able to practice today, Theia was shocked. A few months ago she would definitely have yelled at him, but not anymore. Theia had grown more mature, and she knew that the athletic types wouldn't skip out on practice without a proper reason.

“Yeah. It might take all night.”

“I see…”

Hearing Koutarou's answer, Theia sadly dropped her shoulders. While he felt bad about it, he continued talking.

“While you're all here, there's something I'd like to ask of you.”

Koutarou's next words were directed to the six girls in the room.

“Okay. What is it?”

Sanae who was drifting next to Koutarou, answered right away, without a hint of hesitation. She could no longer imagine turning down any of Koutarou's requests.

“As long as I don't have to freeze.”

Temperature aside, Yurika wanted to realize Koutarou's request. Lately, Koutarou had been giving her food and helping her with her homework, so she wanted to do something to help him.

“Sure, but it'll cost you, Koutarou.”

Christmas Eve

Kiriha smiled cheerfully as always. She enjoyed all things in her own little way. This time was the same and she was thinking of ways she could tease Koutarou.

“That's fine. I'm free today anyways.”

Normally Christmas was spent with your family, but since Shizuka had already lost hers, she was grateful for Koutarou's request. Shizuka knew the loneliness of standing on the sidelines while everyone else was partying, more so than anyone.

“…Uhm…”

Theia couldn't answer right away. Instead she turned her eyes away from Koutarou and looked at Ruth.

Fufu.

Ruth smiled slightly and nodded when she saw Theia's expression.

“Very well, let's hear what it is. I'll allow it for all your efforts as of late.”

Theia could only express herself using condescending words, but Ruth, who knew how Theia really felt, desperately tried to hold back her laughter.

In the end, Koutarou hadn't explained any details, and left the room alongside Ruth.

“There's something I want to talk to you about, so could you come by the knitting society's club room around four?”

That was all he had said before he left. So the five remaining girls all had a confused expression on their faces.

“Just what does he want to talk about?”

“You haven't heard anything either, Mackenzie-kun?”

“Yeah. He just told me he had something to talk about, and that I had to go to the knitting society's club room.”

Kenji was the same. He had met up with the girls on the way to school, but since he hadn't been given any details either, he was just as confused as they were.

So as the four invaders, Shizuka and Kenji walked towards the school, they all pondered on what Koutarou wanted to talk about.

“Uhh… I just hope it won't get too cold…”

“Couldn't you do something about that outfit?”

Yurika was walking in the back of the line wearing a thick set of clothes. Because they were now at the end of December, the sun had set sooner and the temperature was dropping quickly. Because of that, Yurika was wearing almost all of the clothes she had and swelled up greatly. It was only natural for Sanae to be amazed by that pathetic appearance.

“Just what is Satomi-kun thinking to not even tell you, Matsudaira-kun.”

Since Kenji was there, Kiriha put on her honor student mask and smiled. However, her smile was real, and she eagerly anticipated seeing just what Koutarou had planned.

“It's definitely nothing important. That's not the kind of atmosphere he was giving off.”

“No, you can't be too sure.”

Reacting to Theia's words, Kenji shook his head.

“Since it's Christmas, I wouldn't even be surprised if he called us over to introduce his girlfriend.”

Kenji shrugged and shook his head.

“Really!? Do you think Satomi-kun got a girlfriend!? Hey, I can't even imagine that!”

Shizuka who loved that kind of conversation jumped on with eyes sparkling. At the same time, she imagined Koutarou going out with various girls in the class.

“Well, he's been popular for a while now.”

“What!? Really!?”

“Eehhhh!? You're kidding!”

All the girls let out a surprised scream at the same time as they heard Kenji's unexpected statement. They then surrounded Kenji and demanded that he explain the details. Even Sanae, who had been the most surprised, forgot that Kenji couldn't see her and demanded an explanation. Kiriha was the only one who remained calm.

“Come on, let us hear the details!”

“Is that true, Mackenzie-kun!?”

“I can't let that pass!”

“Tell me everything without holding anything back.”

“Eh, Yeah.”

While being pressured by the girls, Kenji adjusted his glasses and began explaining.

“Kou's stupid, so normally he wouldn't be popular.”

“Right.”

“If that wasn't the case, it'd be strange.”

Everyone nodded at Kenji's words.

Koutarou wasn't popular.

All the girls here agreed about that. In school, he was never surrounded by the girls in his class; he was always playing around with the boys.

“Well, I can't imagine Satomi-kun getting along with girls.”

“I'd expect that from Matsudaira-san instead.”

“Now that I think about it, Koutarou said something about holding a grudge against glasses-kun regarding Valentine chocolate.”

As they had said, the girls never crowded around Koutarou, but they did crowd Kenji. There were always girls around him. He had a lot of female fans because of his good looks and manners and his ability to do anything well.

“But that's only on the surface.”

“On the surface you say?”

Kenji let out a loud sigh and dropped his shoulders. Complex feelings were welling up inside of him.

“In reality, there are always a small amount of girls in love with him. And they're always the kind of wonderful girls I fall for!”

Kenji grasped his fist and put extra strength behind his sentence. This might be what could be known as the soul roaring.

Christmas Eve

In other words it's a question of quantity vs. quality!

It was true that Koutarou wasn't popular, but all the girls that Kenji fell in love with were all in love with Koutarou. They had all noticed the positive sides Koutarou had.

“The truly wonderful girls all understand Koutarou's good points. Just how many times have my serious confessions failed because of him!?”

The most recent example was Harumi. Kenji would have loved to go out with someone like Harumi. If she was his girlfriend. he would boast about her to anyone. But Harumi loved Koutarou. Anyone with any insight could tell.

Well, everyone probably picks him because I keep thinking about things like this…

Kenji was aware of his own faults. When he picked a girl, he always had a calculation or bargain in his mind. He wasn't as straightforward as Koutarou. All the girls Kenji was interested in noticed that slight difference, so that's why it never went well.

I guess I'm unexpectedly old fashioned… In the end, I can't really laugh at Kou…

Kenji sighed once more while smiling wryly.

“Aren't there at least some of you that have an idea of what I'm talking about?”

Kenji finished by saying that and looked around him. Recently, the girls in front of him were all getting along well with Koutarou. His intuition told him that, regardless of whether they loved him or not, they had at least noticed that side to Koutarou.

“That's true. You would feel more at ease with him as your boyfriend than with Mackenzie-kun.”

Shizuka laughed. She could identify lots of the parts that Kenji had mentioned.

With him not getting involved with anyone, with this many girls around him, he sure is honest or serious…

That's why Shizuka would come down to room 106 to play daily. It was because she trusted Koutarou.

“That's how a man should behave! Being unfaithful is unforgivable!”

Yurika was worried about Harumi.

I can leave Sakuraba-senpai to Satomi-san, because of the way he is! I could never entrust her to someone who has a new girl every day!

She would be troubled if Koutarou was as popular with the girls as Kenji was. It would then always worry Harumi. Koutarou could only take Harumi and Yurika out on dates.

“That's a given!”

Slightly angry, Sanae stuck her tongue out at Kenji. Since Kenji couldn't see her, he didn't mind.

I have this charm, so I know that better than anyone!

Sanae had a charm with the words 'Family Safety' engraved on it in her hand. As long as that was in her hand, it proved Koutarou's value.

“That's right. Koutarou isn't as scheming of a man as you are.”

Theia nodded as if it was obvious.

That's my knight. Knights are paragons of virtue. If that wasn't the case, I wouldn't have given him the title!

Christmas Eve

Theia was no longer trying to make Koutarou her vassal because of the trial. She was doing it for her own sake.

“It looks like you all know what I'm talking about.”

Seeing everyone's response, Kiriha smiled.

So in the end, everyone has faith in Koutarou. He's an earnest enough man that I would show him my true colors after all…

If Kiriha didn't already have another man she loved, she believed she would probably want to go out with Koutarou. So she understood what Kenji meant, and she could imagine how the other girls must feel.

“So that's why I wouldn't be surprised if he suddenly introduced his girlfriend.”

“That won't happen.”

“That's too big of a leap, Mackenzie-kun.”

“I won't allow that!”

“That's impossible.”

“Fufu, that's unjust resentment, Matsudaira-san.”

The girls understood what Kenji was trying to say, but at the same time they rejected the idea that Koutarou might have a girlfriend. They hadn't noticed anything like that while living together, so they didn't believe it.

“No, you can't be so sure, he might just get a girlfriend all of a sudden.”

“He's not like you, Mackenzie-kun.”

“That's right.”

“If that was the case he would tell me in advance.”

“If it's Ruth I could forgive him.”

“Everyone, if you put it that way, Matsudaira-san will feel bad.”

The girls began sensing that, although they might not see them, there might be a lot of girls that loved Koutarou.

Christmas Eve

Part 2

As Theia opened the door to the knitting society's club room, several small explosive sounds rang out. Surprised by the sound, she jumped back.

“Kyaaaaaa!?”

Although Yurika had been the only one to scream, the other girls and Kenji peeked into the club room to find out what's going on.

“Merry Christmas!”

Christmas Eve

Christmas Eve

Inside were Koutarou, Harumi and Ruth. On top of that there were several familiar faces from the drama club. And they were all holding crackers that they had just used.

“Come on, don't just space out. Come in! Come in!”

Unable to understand the situation, Theia and the others were pulled in by the drama club's president.

“The drama club send-off & Christmas party?”

As Theia was being pulled into the room, she saw a banner hung up on the back wall, decorations all over the room and a large quantity of food. Thanks to that, Theia and the others were finally able to get a grasp on the situation.

“Woah, so you were holding a Christmas party today!”

“Oh, is that all…”

“Alright! There's lots of food!”

“Yurika-chan, you're drooling.”

“Fufufu, looks like Satomi-kun deceived us all.”

Koutarou had called Theia and the others over to hold a party together. Since it served as both a Christmas party and a send-off party for the play being held next year, everyone related to the play had been invited.

“What took you so long?”

“Koutarou, just what is this commotion?”

Although they had understood the circumstances, there were still a lot of things they didn't know, so Theia asked Koutarou, who was approaching them while wearing a Santa outfit.

“Your highness, this party was planned by the drama club president. We weren't told what was about to happen until just a moment ago. The only ones who knew were the few people helping with preparations: Satomi-sama and Harumi-sama.”

Ruth, also wearing a Santa outfit, answered Theia's question.

The drama club president had planned the party. Since it was a surprise party, the preparations had to be made in secret. And since Koutarou was known to be tight-lipped, he was asked to help out. Since preparing for a party would be too hard on his own, Koutarou had involved Harumi for the same reason. Koutarou's role was to prepare the decorations, but because he lacked the sense for it, he relied on Harumi. On the day of the event, Koutarou had requested Ruth to help him with the food. Since they were jogging together, it was easy to let her in on the plan.

The reason the knitting society's club room was being used to hold the party was because the drama club's club room wasn’t big enough. It was already full of props and sets for their upcoming play, so they didn't have any spare room for tables. In that respect, the knitting society club room was only being used by two people, so they had plenty of space. Because of that, the knitting society's president, that is, Harumi's cooperation was also required.

“That's right. The president's a big tease. You only had to mention it.”

“Yeah. I wasn't sure what was going to happen when you told me you had something important to discuss.”

The drama club members crowded around Ruth and added to her story. They only learned the truth after entering this room a moment ago. Just like Theia and the others had now.

Christmas Eve

“I see… Who's the one who said Koutarou has something important to say?”

Having learned the truth, Shizuka grinned and looked at Kenji.

“What are you talking about, landlord-san?”

“Well you see, Satomi-kun, Mackenzie-kun—”

“Wah! Wait, wait, Kasagi-san, timeout!”

Shizuka was about to reveal what Kenji had said before he hurriedly stopped her and pulled her over to a corner of the room.

“Kya! Mackenzie-kun you pervert!”

“Don't say anything that'll give me a bad reputation please!”

“W-What?”

Shizuka let out an oddly enough cheerful scream as Kenji began to panic. Not understanding what was going on, Koutarou just blankly stared at them and tilted his head in confusion. When he did, the Santa hat on top of his head shook around humorously. By the way, the ball on top of the hat he was wearing had been made by Harumi the day before yesterday. There was plenty of wool to spare and it was easy to make.

“Let's eaaa~t!”

However, he returned to his senses when he heard Yurika's voice.

“Hey Yurika, at least hold it in until after the toast.”

“Hwah?”

“Hah…, no, it's nothing. Just eat.”

“Hmph.”

Koutarou had tried to stop Yurika as she was starting to pick up the food on the table, but he gave up because she looked so pathetic. Sanae followed up by poking his dropped shoulders.

“Koutarou, did you pick up the new job so—”

When Sanae had mentioned the phrase 'new job,’ Theia and Kiriha looked over at Koutarou.

“Yeah, it was for this. The drama club will cover the expenses in the end, but at the time they had to resolve their current money problems.”

Koutarou had picked up another part-time job for the sake of the party. Although they would cover the expenses eventually, they needed some immediate funding. Since he couldn't just use the money his dad had put in for him to live on, Koutarou and the drama club president had picked up part-time jobs in secret. By the way, the drama club president helped make cakes at the bakery.

“I see, so that's why…”

Theia smiled naturally.

I see, so it was for our sake…

It hadn't been for the sake of a single person, but for several. Although it had only been a part-time job, it made Theia happy.

“I was surprised too.”

“Hmm…”

As I thought, I need to get Koutarou to become her highness's knight, no matter what…

Christmas Eve

Ruth felt that way even more after today's events.

“My my, if you needed money you could have just said so.”

“I can't just pull my friends in to get money.”

“Satomi-kun hates dry relationships after all.”

Kiriha smiled and called out to Koutarou.

This'll give me an excuse to tease Koutarou for a while…

However, a mischievous urge could be seen in the depths of her eyes.

“Thanks for your help, Satomi-kun. You show some promise.”

“Thank you, president.”

That was when the drama club president wearing a Santa outfit approached them.

By the way, there were currently four people wearing Santa outfits. They were Koutarou, the drama club president, Harumi and Ruth; the four people that helped with the party.

“Here, Satomi-kun. Something to drink.”

“Thank you, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“Here, I have some for everyone.”

Harumi came carrying a tray with glasses full of drinks.

At first I was surprised because I thought Satomi-kun was asking me out on a date… but I feel like this is much more like us. Don't you think so too, Nijino-san…?

After handing out drinks, Harumi looked at the back of her best friend, Yurika. However, since Yurika was current occupied with stuffing her face full of food, she didn't notice that glance.

“Does everyone have a drink? We're holding a toast.”

The drama club president took the initiative. Since she was also working as the stage manager, her role included holding a toast. And following her voice, everyone in the room raised their glass.

“Koutarou, I want orange juice.”

“Yes, yes.”

However, Koutarou was holding up two glasses, one with apple juice and one with orange juice.

“Well then, with the singles' lonely end of the year approaching, here's to the success of the play next year! Merry Christmas!”

“Merry Christmas!”

And so, Koutarou's and the others' Christmas party began.

Part 3

After an hour of freely talking and eating, they began playing games. The console was the private property of the drama club's president, and the large TV was rented for this day. This was one of the results of Koutarou's and the president's part-time job.

“Uuuhhh~, my stomach hurts. I can't move.”

However, by that time, Yurika had begun complaining about her stomach. Having focused on eating and avoided talking to anyone this past hour, Yurika's stomach had gone past its limit.

“Is this stomach because of all the clothes you're wearing or because you've eaten too much?”

Sanae poked at Yurika's swollen stomach.

“It's painful, so please don't push it.”

“So it's from overeating.”

Sanae continued to poke at Yurika's stomach. Although she was partially amazed, she seemed to be enjoying herself.

“Waaaaaah, my stomach hurts~”

“You idiot, hold back a little!”

“Even if you say that, there's no guarantee that all this good food won't be gone later. If I don't eat it all now, who knows when I'll get to eat something so good again!”

“Is it really something that important? Geez…”

After laying Yurika down on the couch, Koutarou scratched his head. He felt like he was watching over a useless little sister.

“Yurika, which ones were delicious?”

“T-They were all delicious, but the pizza over there was the most delicious. There're three kinds of cheese and it was like it melted in my mouth.”

“I see. Koutarou, let's go eat some!”

“Yes yes.”

If it was just Yurika it would be fine, but Koutarou couldn't ignore the bad influence she was having on others. It would be problematic if Sanae turned out like Yurika.

I guess I'll get her something good to eat for the end of the year. If it keeps up like this, it'll have a negative influence on Sanae's upbringing…

Although the money spent on the party would be returned, it seemed like they would be returned to Yurika's stomach.

“Yurika, I got some stomach medicine.”

“Thank you~, Kiriha-san. But there's no room for it in my stomach.”

“Ho-, we'll grind it up into dust Ho-”

“It'll be easier to drink than in tablet form.”

“It gets more bitter when grinded, so I don't want too~”

Y-Yurika…

Koutarou took Sanae with him and headed towards the pizza that Yurika had recommended, but as he heard the discussion behind him, he began feeling faint.

Christmas Eve

Are you fine with your life being like that…?

Koutarou couldn't help but feel worried about her future.

“Koutarou.”

When Koutarou and Sanae arrived at Yurika's recommended pizza, Theia appeared at the same time.

“Are the games over?”

“Yeah. I won over everyone, so they chased me out.”

Theia smiled wryly as she looked in the direction where the games were being held. There was a large crowd around the TV and console. Right now they were playing a four player game against one another. Harumi, the club president and two other girls, none of whom were any good at games, were having a go at each other.

Theia, who was good when it came to competitions, had won repeatedly and as a result, ended up being chased off. The winner was supposed to stay, but there was a limit to even that.

“Just hold back a little.”

“Are you telling me to lose on purpose?”

When Koutarou pointed out that Theia had gone too far, her cheeks puffed up and she frowned as looked up at Koutarou.

“It's not like there was an opponent you had to show off your abilities too, right?”

“…”

However after hearing Koutarou's following words, Theia's cheeks shrunk down to normal size.

“That's true. I'll be more careful next time.”

Theia smiled and looked towards the games once more.

So she's only able to make expressions like these while on Earth, huh…

Looking at her profile, Koutarou recalled what Ruth had said.

Theia was only able to make expressions a girl of her age should while she was on Earth. That's why Koutarou wanted to help her.

When he looked at Theia he reaffirmed that wish.

“Your highness, Satomi-sama, have some food.”

That was when Ruth appeared and presented them with plates full of food. Ruth looked straight at Koutarou and Theia and gently smiled at them.

“Thanks, Ruth.”

“No, it's nothing.”

“Koutarou, the pizza.”

“I got it, I got it.”

While Theia was taking the plate in Ruth's right hand, the plate in Ruth's left hand came flying towards Koutarou. That was due to Sanae's poltergeist, and the plate landed in Koutarou's hand, just as she had planned. It was the kind of supernatural phenomenon that would make anyone watching freak out, but fortunately no one that wasn't aware of Sanae saw it.

“Koutarou, say ah.”

“Ah-”

Following up, Sanae controlled Koutarou's right arm and brought the pizza that was lying on the plate into his mouth. All Koutarou did on his own was opening his mouth.

“Ah, this really is delicious.”

“At least something good came from Yurika trying everything.”

The thick taste of cheese and refreshing acidity of tomato spread throughout Koutarou's mouth, creating an exquisite texture. It was a satisfying taste for both Koutarou and Sanae, who was hanging onto Koutarou's back.

As Koutarou was satisfyingly chewing on the pizza, he noticed Theia looking around the room.

What's she looking at?

Interested, Koutarou began chasing her glance, and then Theia muttered, as if she was trying to answer Koutarou's question.

“Everyone seems to be very motivated.”

Theia wasn't looking at the room, but the people in it. The drama club members and those related to the play. Their smiles and energetic voices overflowed in the normally quiet club room.

“They get along well and their teamwork is excellent.”

“Yes. If it stays like this, the next play is sure to succeed as well.”

Then Ruth, who was carrying a waiter's tray, responded to Theia. She then joined in and looked around the room.

“That would be great, but it's going to be quite difficult.”

Their next play was different from the last. Since it was the climax of the story, it was far more difficult than the previous play. Therefore, Theia figured there was a 50/50 chance of the play succeeding.

“Stupid.”

Koutarou responded by hitting Theia atop her head with his now empty plate.

“Ow! What are you doing, Koutarou! How dare you hit a princess's head with a plate—”

“That's it, that's the spirit.”

Next, Koutarou lightly tapped the angry Theia's head twice.

“…Eh?”

“You're the leader, so you have to keep showing everyone your high spirits.”

“Koutarou…”

Theia had assumed that Koutarou was bullying her again, so she got so surprised by what Koutarou said next that she forgot her anger.

“You've been thinking about the people around you more lately, but at the same time I feel like your spirit has gone down.”

The games from before was a good example. The more mature Theia had grown to become more considerate for the people around her. But from time to time, it was better not to demonstrate that consideration. This was one of those times. Theia wasn't the stage manager, but as the writer of the manuscript, she was in a position to push the play along. It would be for the better if that kind of person didn't show any strange consideration. In fact, the actors would

probably feel more relieved if she had enough spirit to make everyone follow her directions without objections.

That was Koutarou speaking from experience. The worst part for him was when his coach would show a nervous or anxious expression in the middle of a game.

“It's better to just do things instead of worrying too much.”

“But…”

Even though he had said that, Theia's expression didn't change.

Theia had been feeling anxious for a while now. She wasn't sure if she should be standing above other people. She wasn't sure if she could get people to obey her like the Silver Princess did. She had always been anxious about that. It was a new worry that had been born from Theia's consideration of others.

“Don't worry. Everyone will follow you, the way you are now.”

Koutarou calmly said that while pointing at the surrounding people with his glance. Before she had realized it, a large amount of glances were focused on Theia. Everyone had stopped eating and playing games and focused on Theia. As Koutarou had said, everyone there now had high expectations of her.

“Everyone is… I see…”

Theia's worry was deeply rooted. But when Koutarou had spoken, she had understood something.

Regardless of whether I can do it or not, there are times when I have too, huh…

When Theia realized that, her expression and eyes began to shine. She smiled with confidence and challenge. That was the appearance of a strong leader.

“That's it, that's how it should be.”

Seeing Theia like that, Koutarou revealed a smile of relief. Her current appearance was just what he had been hoping for.

“…Just who do you think you're talking to, Satomi Koutarou.”

“To the princess I can't help but respect.”

Koutarou dropped his shoulders, joking around. He then carried more food into his mouth. All the food was delicious, not just the pizza.

“If you're going to go that far, then I trust that you're prepared.”

“That's not it.”

However, the recently emptied plate struck Theia on top of her head again. It was a sign telling her to be more aggressive. Theia understood that as well.

“Then prepare yourself, Satomi Koutarou! You and I will travel the road of carnage!”

So Theia boldly stated. What was needed now was that kind of Theia.

“As you wish, my princess.”

“I trust you won't go back on your words.”

“I promise, Theia. I'll make the play a success.”

There was no hesitation in Koutarou's answer. He was planning on making the play a success together with Theia.

Christmas Eve

“Alright!”

After Theia and Koutarou nodded at each other, Theia then raised her voice to speak to everyone in the room.

“All of you! We'll make this play a success, no matter what! Got that!?”

Her powerful voice spread through the room.

“Yeaaaaaah!!”

In response to Theia's words, all the people in the room responded as one.

As Theia had said, the people who had gathered here had excellent teamwork.

Christmas Eve

Part 4

Koutarou and Harumi were heading for the school gate together. The clock had now passed 7:30PM. The party the drama club was hosting was still ongoing, but the two of them had snuck out.

The reason for that was because it was time for Harumi to go home. She had her last examination for the year scheduled in the morning, so she had to limit what she was eating for today and stay rested. So, as an extra precaution, she had decided to return home early.

She ended up returning home with a taxi. Since the taxi would arrive at the school gate, Koutarou had offered to accompany her. Although the school was right behind them, things were dangerous at night.

“Satomi-kun, it's gotten a lot colder, hasn't it?”

“It's been cold for a while now, so maybe snow will fall.”

Having passed through the school gate, the two of them stared up into the night sky. Because of all the clouds, they couldn't see the stars. The temperature was low and their breath could be seen.

The taxi still hadn't arrived, and the bus stop in front of the school gate was empty, with only a single streetlight lighting up the area. Seeing that lone sight, Koutarou felt like it was a good idea to accompany Harumi.

“A white Christmas would be wonderful.”

“You're a princess, Sakuraba-senpai, can't you make it snow?”

“Ahaha, Satomi-kun, don't be too unreasonable please.”

Laughter leaked out from Harumi's lips.

“If you're going to be that mean, I'll make you real a dragon, Satomi-kun.”

“I would much prefer not to.”

Koutarou started laughing alongside her.

“But still, it's really cold.”

“Since we were in such high spirits before, we might feel colder than it is.”

Just a while ago the two of them had been in the middle of a heated party. Koutarou and Harumi had gotten excited and played around as well. It was the opposite of their current situation.

“High spirits huh. I can't quite imagine you as a tomboy, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“Neither can I, geez.”

Harumi put her hand in front of her mouth and began giggling. However at the same time, her body was lightly shaking.

You really are freezing aren't you, Sakuraba-senpai… That's right!

Seeing Harumi freezing, Koutarou remembered what he was carrying.

“I have just the thing, Sakuraba-senpai.”

Koutarou shoved his hand into his pocket and pulled out what was inside.

“A hat?”

“This one's mine. I have something else for you.”

Christmas Eve

Koutarou had pulled out a red Santa hat from his pocket. It was the hat he had been wearing at the start of the party.

“What is it?”

“Well it's not really something to get excited about.”

Koutarou quickly put on the hat and this time he shoved his hand into the inside of his jacket. Inside was something he had been planning on giving Harumi as a parting gift.

“Ho Ho Ho.”

Giving off a Santa-like laughter, Koutarou pulled out a colorful package with a ribbon. It was about as big as a comic magazine, but it was very light. The package rustled as Koutarou presented it to Harumi.

“Santa has a present for such a good girl.”

“My…”

As she glanced at the package, Harumi's expression brightened up.

“Is this for me?”

“Ho ho ho, that's right.”

Koutarou nodded as Harumi asked. After that, Harumi received the wrapping with both hands.

“Thank you.”

Harumi pressed the package against her chest as she lightly bowed at Koutarou. As she did, he smile was radiant.

“That said, it's not really something I could be proud of.”

But Koutarou quickly began scratching his head in embarrassment. Since he knew what was inside, he couldn't help himself.

“Can I open it?”

Since Harumi was so interested in the contents of the package, she hadn't noticed his embarrassed expression.

“Go ahead. It should be of use to you right now… But it might just be for now.”

Waiting for Koutarou to nod, Harumi gently undid the ribbon around the package and peeked inside.

“Ah, this is…”

Having confirmed what was inside, Harumi's expression grew even brighter. She hurriedly pulled out the contents.

“A muffler…”

A hand-knitted muffler came out of the package. However it was very poorly made. Because the knitter’s skill was poor, there were bumps and it curved all over the place.

“Satomi-kun, you remembered…”

However, Harumi showed no signs of disappointment, and instead smiled happily as she stretched it out.

Satomi-kun gave this to me…

That was the practice work that Koutarou had been knitting since spring, turned into a muffler. And that's why only the first part had such poor quality.

Christmas Eve

“I worried quite a bit, if something like this would work as a present or not.”

Koutarou remembered that Harumi had once said that she loved the first part of his practice work. That was because it was the part that showed off his hard work the most. That said, he wasn't sure if she would actually be happy if she received something like this. There aren't that many that would be happy getting a poorly hand-knitted muffler.

“That's not true, I'm really happy. Thank you.”

However, Harumi was one of those few. On top of having knitting as a hobby, that muffler was chock-full of memories from spring and onwards. So, to Harumi, this was a very welcome present. She was also happy that Koutarou had remembered their discussion.

Gave me this to me as a present…

Harumi's eyes began tearing up. She knew that Koutarou didn't have any special intention behind this gift, but she was so happy that she couldn't help but expect those intentions.

“Does it look good on me?”

Harumi wrapped the muffler around her neck and smiled at Koutarou. It looked almost as if she was dancing when she spun around to show off the muffler.

Christmas Eve

Christmas Eve

“It doesn't. Your taste in mufflers is terrible.”

“Be silent. What makes a mere knight think he can extend his opinion to a princess?”

“That line's not in the manuscript though.”

“Even I can ad-lib on occasion.”

It was still as cold as always, and it only got colder as the night progressed.

However, Harumi could no longer feel that coldness.

Part 5

A headlight approached from the distance. Since it was a straight road with little traffic, it stood out very well, so Koutarou noticed it right away.

“Looks like the taxi is coming.”

“…Eh?”

“What do you mean 'Eh?’ Sakuraba-senpai, aren't you supposed to get on that and go home?”

“R-Right. I'm sorry.”

Harumi had been so absorbed in the muffler that she had completely forgotten about the taxi.

Ah, I almost forgot!

And at the same time she remembered something else she had forgotten.

“Satomi-kun, I actually have a present too.”

Normally she might not have been able to squeeze out those words; however, the malformed muffler around her neck gave her courage.

“For me?”

“Yes.”

“But I haven't been a good kid.”

“I don't mind. I'm not Santa after all.”

Harumi giggled as she reached into her bag.

But I think you've been a great kid, Satomi-kun…

As she thought of that, Harumi pulled out a long and slender object.

“Are these knitting needles?”

“Yes. I worried quite a bit if something like this would work as a present for a boy.”

Harumi had gotten Koutarou knitting needles as a present. The knitting needles were made of bamboo and wrapped into a beautiful package and ribbon. As Harumi was holding the package against her chest, it looked like she was holding a bouquet.

“Here, Satomi-ku—”

As Harumi presented the package to Koutarou, she was seized by a strange sensation.

Huh…? Hasn't this happened once before…?

That was a strong sense of deja vu. Harumi felt like this wasn't the first time she had given Koutarou a present.

“What's the matter, Sakuraba-senpai?”

Confused by Harumi suddenly stopping, Koutarou called out to her. When his voice reached her ears, a scene appeared in her mind.

“What's the matter, Alia-sama?”

“No, it's nothing.”

In that scene was Koutarou wearing a blue armor and Harumi holding a silvery sword.

I see, this is a scene from the play…

Christmas Eve

Harumi remembered that the scene playing in her head had occurred in the manuscript. Ever since she got the manuscript, she had spent any spare time she had on reading it. That's why she had assumed that was the reason for the deja vu.

“No, it's nothing.”

Harumi giggled and presented Koutarou with the knitting needles again.

“I was just thinking that this kind of scene was in the manuscript.”

“Ah, that's true.”

Koutarou nodded, satisfied with the answer he had gotten. He then kneeled in front of Harumi. The two of them had serious expressions.

It was the scene when the Silver Princess presented the Blue Knight with Signaltin. In that scene, the Blue Knight and Silver Princess faced each other like this.

“Lord Bertorion. From now on, this sword will protect you. From any enemy and any trial.”

“Then I will use my life and this sword to protect you, princess Alaia.”

As they spoke the lines in the manuscript, Harumi handed the knitting needles over to Koutarou. It was a masterful scene full of feelings they could never say themselves.

However, after Koutarou had received the knitting needles, the two of them burst out laughing.

“Ahahahaha!”

“Wahahahaha!”

“A-As if I bamboo knitting needles could protect anything! Ufufufu, ahahahaha!”

“W-What's that supposed to mean, you're the one who said it, kukuku, wahahahaha!”

Koutarou stood up as he laughed loudly. However, his footing was unsteady because he was laughing so much. Harumi bent forwards, seemingly in pain, as she continued laughing. The two of them were laughing from the depths of their hearts.

“Hahahaha, Hah— Look, Sakuraba-senpai!”

“Eh?”

“Look, snow is falling!”

What stopped those two from laughing was snow falling from the sky.

“Ah… it's beautiful…”

Harumi lost her breath because of the beauty of the snow, seemingly dancing through the sky. She then reached her hands into the air and began catching the snow.

It was only obvious for Harumi to lose her breath from the beauty of the gently falling snow being lit up by the street light. Koutarou on the other hand wasn't looking at the falling snow.

The Silver Princess, huh…

Koutarou was looking at Harumi playing with the snow. The Silver Princess was only a role that had been given to her, but as he looked at Harumi covered in snow, she surpassed her role and filled Koutarou's heart.

“…Merry Christmas, Satomi-kun.”

And when he saw the smile Harumi showed as she turned around, Koutarou felt a little sad that he wasn't the true Blue Knight.

The Fire Dragon Emperor and the Silver Princess

Part 1

Sunday, January 10

“Let's go, Yurika.”

The strong lighting on the stage made the blade of Koutarou's sword shine bright white. This sword was the treasured sword Saguratin that Theia had lent Koutarou alongside with the armor he was wearing. She had told the other actors in the play that it was a special-ordered replica, but in reality, the blade was real. That said, thanks to the armor creating a barrier to block the blade, there was no fear of cutting anyone.

“No way!”

However, Yurika who was going to be Koutarou's opponent was afraid. Even though there had been attempts to assure her that the blade would be blocked by the repulsion barrier created by the armor, Yurika simply couldn't relax when she saw the blade shining in the light.

I'll be cut! Satomi-san is definitely going to cut me up!!

Yurika cried inside the large costume she was wearing. Yurika was currently wearing a costume acting as a giant dragon while facing off against Koutarou. That dragon's name was the Fire Dragon Emperor, Alunaya. It was the strongest enemy that the Blue Knight would fight at the climax of the play.

When the discussion for who would play the role came up, Yurika's name popped up as someone known for acting animals. When she had been acting as a horse's rear, her acting prowess had been overwhelming, and no other human could keep up. Yurika had been overjoyed when she thought she it was her time to shine, but that joy only lasted until they began practicing the play.

“Don't be selfish, Yurika! There are people waiting to use the stage!”

“Even if you say that!”

Not only did the sword look sharp, but Koutarou who was wielding it looked just like a tough knight. Koutarou's training with Theia over the winter vacation hadn't just been for show.

“I'll definitely get cut in half!”

Yurika, whose tears were still streaming down her cheeks, imagined herself being cut in half along with her costume. Yurika's fear had only grown more powerful when she had joined Koutarou and Theia in watching a movie from Forthorthe to prepare for the play. The Forthorthe knight that appeared in the movie cut any enemy in half. That image was burnt into Yurika's mind, and it scared her.

“Yurika, what kind of dragon emperor acts like that!! Keep it together!!”

“Uwaaaah, that's impossible! At least do something about your sword!”

“That's impossible!

“Nooooo!”

Theia furiously shouted at Yurika from the bottom of the stage, but that wasn't enough for Yurika's fear to go away. The Fire Dragon Emperor, Alunaya shook its head and retreated off the stage.

If she was acting a scared dragon it would be perfect, but…

Seeing that, Theia went past being amazed and was instead impressed.

“Yurika-chan, you can't be like that. If anything, you should be trying to go all out to beat Satomi-kun!”

“Ah, beat Satomi-san!?”

What changed Yurika's mind was the drama club president acting as the stage manager's shout.

That's right, I only need to beat him before he beats me!! I only need to defeat him before he cuts me!!

Thanks to the stage manager's words, Yurika was able to gain enough hope to overcome her fear of being cut in half. She would defeat Koutarou before he could attack her. By doing that, she wouldn't have to be scared.

“Gufufufu, *roar*, *roaaar*!”

The Fire Dragon Emperor's giant figure advanced. The dragon’s stride was completely different from before, and fitting of the name Fire Dragon Emperor, Alunaya. It was almost as if each step caused a tremor.

“Ah, Koutarou, it looks like Yurika's gotten motivated.”

“That'll help.”

“Yeah. But it seems like it's a bit different from being motivated…”

“I'll beat him, I'll beat Satomi-san! By doing that I won't have to be scared!”

Yurika's eyes were bloodshot and she continued muttering to herself. Clinging on to her tiny hope, Yurika pointed Alunaya's head upwards and roared.

“Yurika fight! Yurika fight!!”

But of course, that wasn't hope, but rather escapism or desperation; it was simply an illusion.

This was the first day of stage practice after the winter vacation had ended.

The goal behind this practice was to perform all scenes from start to finish. But rather than confirming the abilities of each individual actor, the focus lied on the staff to get a feel for the flow. There were countless things to check: the acting, the sets, outfits, special effects, the lighting and more.

“*roar* *roar*”

“Nijino-san, get it together!”

“Leave it to me, Sakuraba-senpa— kyaaaaaa!!”

“Hey, don't run, Yurika!!”

The Fire Dragon Emperor, Alunaya costume that Yurika was wearing was amongst the most important things to check. The outside appearance still had plenty of things to touch up on, but they needed to confirm if the props inside were functional. Because the performance was set to play at the end of the month, they had to hurry up and finish anything mechanical.

“S-Satomi-san, you were just about cut me in half, weren't you!?”

“Of course. That's what I'm supposed to do in this scene.”

“Since you're a villain, just accept your fate and get cut up.”

“Satomi, cut the tail off next.”

“Understood.”

Inside the Alunaya costume were devices that let the tail fly off when cut or to spew fire from its mouth. Through the use of wires, it would be able to fly through the sky. The props team had put various devices inside the costume to make this possible through their combined techniques and hard work. That was just how excited they had gotten for the play.

“Hmm, aside from Yurika's courage, the devices are all functioning properly.”

“Good. Alunaya is an exceptionally well made prop for a high school play.”

“I heard the props team spent several nights working on it.”

At that moment, Koutarou's sword cut off the costume’s tail. Seeing the device work flawlessly, Theia nodded satisfied from below the stage.

“You have all done great job! Allow me to praise you, you can feel proud!”

“Alriiight, it's a success!!”

The props team that were looking up on the stage next to Theia cheered. This was the moment where all their blood, sweat and tears paid off. Looking at their cheerful expressions, Theia nodded once more. Then Ruth, who was nearby, called out to Theia.

“It looks like preparations are proceeding smoothly, your highness.”

“Yes. All we can do now is put our expectations on the actors.”

The Alunaya costume included, preparations for the play were proceeding smoothly. This was the second time these members worked together on a play, so the outfits and sets were all prepared and the lighting check-up was continuing smoothly.

So it was just as Theia had said, all that's left now were the actors.

Part 2

“T-That was… really scaryyy~”

“Good work, Nijino-san.”

Having finished her part, Yurika shivered while holding her knees while Harumi was gently consoling her. It looked like a giant dragon crying to a princess, but it looked oddly picturesque with Harumi smiling.

“Lately it's been hard to say no to Sakuraba-senpai.”

After taking a picture of Harumi and Yurika, Shizuka began talking to Koutarou who was nearby. Since the scenes were leading up to the climax of the second half, Shizuka's turn was still a bit away since she was playing a maid. So Shizuka was left to take pictures for an activity report.

“Is that so?”

“I guess you can say she's getting used to being a princess… well, she might just be getting used to acting in front of people.”

“Well, I can agree that it looks like she's gotten used to it.”

Koutarou was always practicing with Harumi, so he couldn't quite get a grasp for her change. Since she had slowly changed in front of him, he couldn't get a good feel for it. But since Shizuka hadn't seen Harumi act for a while, the change was noticeable for her.

But compared to the Harumi back in spring, she had gotten much better at dealing with people. She had stopped getting nervous when speaking to people she didn't know, and she would even smile from time to time. It was clear that ever since she had gotten up on the stage, Harumi had grown a lot.

“Hey, Theia.”

“What?”

“Since Sakuraba-senpai has gotten more used to it, shouldn't we switch back the Blue Knight role to Mackenzie?”

In the beginning, Koutarou had only gotten the role as the Blue Knight because Harumi was unable to act with anyone else. But now, Koutarou felt like there was no longer any need to worry. So he suggested that the roles were switched back to their original casting, with Kenji as the Blue Knight.

“A-Absolutely not, you're good as the Blue Knight!”

However, Theia shook her head with an awfully surprised expression.

“Why? He looks better.”

“Why, w-well…”

Theia couldn't answer right away. But she already had her answer.

My knights are just you and Ruth…

The thought of training a knight other than Koutarou never entered Theia's mind. Her knights were just Koutarou and Ruth. That was the firm thought she held inside her.

But Theia couldn't say that out loud. If she did, Koutarou would have to answer, and that scared her. So Theia's glance naturally shifted to Harumi who was behind Koutarou.

“That might but true, but it's too late for that now, Satomi-sama.”

Seeing her master troubled, Ruth answered instead.

“We've already begun advertising. And besides, if we suddenly changed the roles, I don't think Mackenzie-sama could pick up the Blue Knight's role in the short time we have left.”

The advertising for the play had already begun. In the past, flyers had been scattered around the area and put up on bulletin boards. Of course, the cast was listed on those flyers. If they altered the cast now, they had to correct all those flyers.

And since the play was set for the end of the month, Kenji would only have about two weeks to learn all of the Blue Knight's scenes in order for him to make it in time.

Ruth was calling the change in cast unrealistic because of those two reasons.

“I see… and here I was thinking I could slack off…”

“Stop thinking of stupid things and get back on the stage! Next up is your fight with the minister and court magician!”

“Yes, yes. As you wish, my princess.”

Koutarou revealed a small bitter smile and climbed back up onto the stage with light steps.

“‘As you wish, my princess’ huh…”

“I just wish those words weren't said jokingly…”

However, the feelings of the two he left behind were anything but light.

The Fire Dragon Emperor and the Silver Princess

Part 3

Koutarou and the other's voices filled the gym where they were practicing.

"You bastard, are you trying to destroy Forthorthe!?"

"Hahaha, that's only obvious, I'm stealing the country after all."

The practice was reaching the climax scene, and Koutarou was talking with the minister, who was the evil mastermind.

A cleverly concealed, complex sensor recorded that and converted it into three-dimensional footage before sending it off somewhere.

"Curse you, fake Blue Knight."

The person looking at the three-dimensional footage was the second princess of Forthorthe, Clan.

She was hiding in the shadows inside the equipment room next to the gym while staring at her bracelet, which was very similar to Theia's. The complex sensor was streaming the three-dimensional footage of the gym to it.

"It's even more irritating now that the acting is becoming of him…"

Clan's dark, sharp glance was fixed on Koutarou. She was plotting revenge on Koutarou after getting in the way of her previous attack. And those feelings even exceeded those she had for Theia. Clan believed that as long as she got in the way of Theia's trial, she didn't need to defeat her, but she felt she had to defeat Koutarou no matter what.

Clan had a lot of pride, just like Theia, and as a woman from Forthorthe she had strong feelings for the Blue Knight. So having a commoner from an undeveloped planet pointed a sword at her, dressed up as the Blue Knight, and even worse, defeating her, was completely unacceptable.

"But still, I can't seem to find an opening. How irritating!"

So Clan was watching for Koutarou to reveal an opening. But she couldn't find the kind of opening she wanted. That was because Koutarou was almost never alone, but the opening she wanted had some rather harsh conditions.

Clan wanted Koutarou to know who he had lost to when he fell over, and to regret ever pointing his blade at her. So she wanted to defeat Koutarou after showing herself to him. If she didn't, her wounded pride would never heal.

Because of that, the only time she could attack was when Koutarou had separated from Theia and the others and where there were few people watching. Of course, that situation rarely happened. Because of that, Clan had kept waiting for a chance to show up for a while now.

"Hm?"

That was when Clan spotted Koutarou getting off the stage and heading towards the back of the gym alone. Based on the footage she could see of the gym, it looked like they were taking a short break before the last scene.

"That's it, this is the perfect chance to send him my greetings!"

Behind her glasses, a fire was burning in her eyes.

The back of the gym was isolated, and the only one else there was Harumi. It was possible for her to reveal herself in a way that only Koutarou would understand, and possibly even defeat him then and there.

"My chance is finally here!"

Clan swiftly operated her bracelet and shut off the footage. She jumped out from the shadows of the equipment room and rushed forwards in Koutarou's direction. Her steps were light, almost like a dancer's. She was excited that her chance for revenge had finally arrived.

“Just you wait, fake Blue Knight! I'll be right there!”

Clan was almost like a girl running to her first date with her first boyfriend.

After running for a few meters, she gently kicked the ground. As she did, it was almost as if she sprouted wings and flew up into the sky. Clan showed no signs of surprise as she continued to rise up into the sky. The speed at which she rose was much faster than when she was running, and she flew past the roof of the gym in an instant.

This was the ability of a new tool she had invented. The defensive barrier that Clan and Theia were using worked by controlling gravity to deflect attacks using the repulsion created from it. Since it could control gravity, it could be adjusted to fly in the sky rather than create a repulsion barrier. That was what Clan was using now. She had altered her own barrier to allow her to fly through the sky.

That said, it wasn't all positives; whenever she flew, the energy use was increased exponentially, and the barrier’s defensive power greatly decreased. The current defensive power was probably less than half of what it had been before. But Clan didn't mind the reduction in defensive power. Since the barrier couldn't stop Koutarou's sword when they fought in the past, she believed it would be better to raise her mobility instead. In reality, her movements in the air were impressive as she gracefully changed her posture and moved almost like a fairy that could be seen in movies or anime. It was fundamentally different from Yurika's flight using wires.

“There he is!”

At the same time that she spotted Koutarou and Harumi, she gently touched her bracelet. When she did, her appearance melded with the blue sky and disappeared. This was yet another counter-measure for Koutarou; by setting up a field that let the surrounding light pass through her body, she would become invisible. Whether she liked it or not, when she was flying in the sky she was bound to stand out, so this was another indispensable equipment of hers.

And what's more, Clan pulled out a strangely mechanically designed large-scale rifle from a hole in the space-time. This rifle was an even further improved version of the rifle she had used before. Since it was expected to be used in the sky without footing, it was smaller and the accuracy had been increased. In return, the amount of bullets it could fire was greatly reduced, but when considering the use, it was an appropriate design. In the past, it had been too large to keep up with Koutarou's speed.

“Let's start by trying him out!”

Clan held the beam rifle with both hands and pointed the barrel at Koutarou. As she did, the scope that was synchronized with the bracelet automatically aimed. Although it was an unstable shooting from the sky, the scope wasn't shaking at all. Clan's preparations were perfect.

“If you can do anything in this situation then please show me, fake Blue Knight!”

A smile appeared on Clan's lips as she squeezed the trigger.

Clan wasn't planning on defeating Koutarou with this surprise attack. If Koutarou died without knowing who defeated him, she would never feel better. So her aim was to attack Koutarou's right arm and make him unable to use his sword.

There's no way you could dodge this! Get taken by surprise, fake Blue Knight!”

A scorching hot, heavy metal particle came flying through the muzzle of the rifle. The beam consisting of heavy metal that had been heated by electromagnetism inside the barrel,

approached Koutarou with a frightening speed. Since it had been fired by a handheld firearm, the speed wasn't as quick as a one fired from a spaceship, but it was far faster than a gun using gunpowder. At this point, Clan was convinced of her victory.

Koutarou had his back facing Clan and was talking to Harumi; he had completely dropped his guard. He was fired upon by in that state by Clan who was flying in the air and invisible. On top of that, the distance between them was so close that the rifle had no chance of missing. Koutarou wasn't showing any signs of activating the barrier on the armor either.

No matter how you looked at it, Clan should be able to shoot right through Koutarou's right arm. And when that happened, Koutarou would be unable to swing his sword around. After that, she could do whatever she pleased. A knight that couldn't use a sword was no match for her.

However, that's when something unexpected happened.

The exact moment before the beam hit Koutarou, it crashed into a white wall and scattered. There was no damage to Koutarou.

“Impossible!?”

Seeing her shot get blocked, she hurriedly checked the data on her bracelet.

“It wasn't a repulsion barrier!? Then, just what is it!?”

At first, Clan had thought that the armor had reacted to the beam and automatically protected Koutarou with a barrier. However, her bracelet couldn't detect any distortion in gravity. It wasn't a barrier created by Forthorthe.

“And the fake Blue Knight hasn't even noticed!? Then just what— Hah!?”

After going through the data, Clan looked back at Koutarou. There was someone facing Koutarou, who hadn't noticed he had been shot at.

“Could it—”

A chill ran through Clan's spine.

Harumi, who was facing Koutarou, was staring right at Clan. It was as if she noticed Clan was there.

Could it be that that fake Silver Princess did something!?

Clan and Harumi stared at each other. Harumi's eyes were calm and showed no signs of wavering. Her eyes were shining with a strong will, just like the sword crest on her forehead. Seeing those eyes, Clan's intuition told her that Harumi had blocked her attack. It was a logical conclusion, and when Clan looked into Harumi's eyes, that was the only thing she could think off.

“There's no mistaking it. That girl, that fake Silver Princess is—”

At the same time she came to that conclusion, Harumi raised her right arm, past Koutarou's shoulder and pointed her palm straight towards Clan.

“Gathering spirits of light, become like a heat daze, dance, dance—”

“She's counter attacking!? And this is!?”

A small ball of light appeared in Harumi's palm. There was no doubt that it was some kind of reaction to Clan's attack. The ball of light soon reached the size of a tennis ball and glowed stronger alongside the sword crest on her forehead. But that wasn't what had surprised Clan.

“The ancient language of Forthorthe!? Just who is this girl!?”

The bracelet's automatic translation function translated what Harumi was saying. It was a language that hadn't been used for over a thousand years, the ancient language of Forthorthe. And Harumi was using special words used by people over a certain status, performing a ritual.

Leaving what she's planning on attacking with aside, facing someone who is using Forthorthe's ancient language's keywords for attacking is too dangerous!!

But Clan wasn't just surprised. The moment she realized she was facing someone unknown, she turned tail and fled. Clan wasn't foolish enough to try to take on two uncertain elements at the same time.

“The fluttering veil's—”

When she did, Harumi stopped speaking mid-sentence. At the same time, the ball of light in her hand disappeared. Seeing that, Clan was overcome with relief.

She let me go…?

As Clan was flying away from Koutarou and Harumi at full speed, she looked back several times. She couldn't help but want to confirm if Harumi was going to chase her down or not. That's just how surprised Clan had been.

But still, just what is happening? That barrier, the ancient language… It's not just the Blue Knight, that Silver Princess is also an unknown fake. I need to come up with some counter-measures right away…

Clan gave up on relief and began coming up with plans to deal with the new enemy.

Part 4

Koutarou looked up after checking his lines, and for some reason, he saw Harumi staring and reaching her hand towards to the sky. Although when Koutarou turned to look in the direction she was staring, he saw nothing but the winter sky.

“…What are you doing, Sakuraba-senpai?”

“Eh?”

Having snapped back reality from Koutarou's call, Harumi blinked repeatedly.

“E-Even if you ask me what, I don't…

Not understanding what she was doing herself, Harumi was at a loss; she instead turned red and hurriedly dropped her hand back down before searching her memories to recall what had happened.

Uhm, we came to the back of the gym to confirm our lines for the next scene and to take a break… I was reading the manuscript with Koutarou… and then… and then… huh?

Harumi tilted her head. The last thing she remembered was reading her lines, and the next thing was Koutarou asking her what she was doing. She had completely forgotten why she had raised her hand into the sky.

“…What was I doing, I wonder?”

“Why are you asking me that, ahahaha!”

Koutarou found himself laughing from the unexpectedly senile answer from Harumi. Her face then turned several degrees redder and she began coming up with excuses in a flustered manner.

“It's because of the acting! I-I've gotten too into my role lately!”

“Gotten too into… W-Well, you were muttering something. Kukuku.”

Koutarou continued laughing. It was so funny that tears formed at the edges of his eyes.

“Satomi-kun, you meanie! I'm being serious here!”

Harumi puffed up her cheeks like a child and held her hands in front of her chest while looking at Koutarou with a defiant look. Seeing the supposedly noble and elegant Silver Princess do that, Koutarou was unable to hold his laughter in.

“Wahahahahah! Ahahahaha!!”

Koutarou shook the manuscript in his hand while laughing. The metallic card Koutarou was using as a bookmark shined every time he shook his manuscript.

T-This won't do. Not at all.

But he realized he was laughing too much, and he shut his eyes and mouth to hold back his feelings.

“I've just been so busy with my duty that I've gotten tired!!”

However Harumi's next words easily pushed Koutarou past his limit.

“Guhah!! S-Senpai, duty…? Y-you sound like a real princess! Wahahaha!!”

“Geez, Satomi-kun!”

Harumi was desperately trying to smooth things over, however Harumi's effort only fanned the flames of Koutarou's laughter.

“Kuku, kukukuku, s-senpai, y-you've got a surprisingly fun side to you, gufufufufu!!”

“Please forget everything that just happened!”

Harumi's mind turned blank. She was really embarrassed, and felt somewhat bitter at Koutarou.

She had forgotten about everything else.

“If you laugh anymore, even if it's you, I'll get angry!”

“P-Please!! Get angry!!”

“Hey!!”

However, Harumi would probably notice when she got into bed tonight.

Just how long she had waited for this moment, and just how blissful of a time this was.

The Ideal Knight

Part 1

Sunday, January 17

“Satomi-kun, Satomi-kun.”

“Yes?”

Koutarou was turning around to look after Harumi had called for him when her slender white fingers stuck into his cheek.

“Fufu, it's time.”

“…Senpai, why are you playing such childish pranks?”

With Harumi's finger still in his cheek, he laughed half-amazed.

“Sorry, I just wanted to try it.”

Harumi smiled and lightly tilted her head before grabbing the hem of her dress and turning around. She quickly climbed up the stairs and fled onto stage.

“Geez…”

Koutarou's armor made a clanking noise as he sighed. He scratched his head while looking up at Harumi. At this moment, Koutarou wasn't the only one looking up at Harumi; there were a lot of people involved with the play looking at her while smiling.

Sakuraba-senpai really has been acting more like a princess lately…

Harumi had been really energetic lately. With the performance only a week away and with everyone on edge, Harumi was the only one who still behaved like normal. On top of that, there was no anxiety noticeable at all in her acting. The soft atmosphere she created reduced a lot of people's stress; as a result, she had become the staff's mood maker.

“Theia, that's how it is, so I'm off.”

Having pumped himself up, Koutarou called out to Theia before he climbed up the stairs to chase after Harumi.

“Ah, Yeah…”

The preparations for the play were proceeding smoothly; the actors’ performance, the set, the lighting and special effects were all in the final stages of adjustment for the performance a week from now. Compared to last year’s play, the preparations were carrying on without a hitch. Although they were nervous, everyone was full of confidence and motivation.

“Keep it together and do your best…”

However only one, Theia, had a gloomy expression.

“Lord Bertorion. From now on this sword will protect you. From any enemy and any trial.”

Harumi was speaking in front of Koutarou, presenting him with a sword. Her tone of voice was calm and gentle. However at the same time, the painfully sad meaning behind those words was overflowing.

“Then I will use my life and this sword to protect you, princess Alaia.”

Koutarou, kneeling, accepted the sword and her feelings. Koutarou had noticed the feelings in the sword and Harumi's words. Even though he had noticed, he still didn't answer her feelings. He couldn't.

“Those two are wonderful…”

The Ideal Knight

“I want to experience that kind of love…”

Yurika and Shizuka, who were looking up on the stage together, sighed. Yurika was always going on about her shoujo mangas and Shizuka loved love stories, so the two felt a strong sense of admiration as they looked up on the stage.

Koutarou and Harumi were currently acting out the scene where the Silver Princess, Alaia, was presenting the Blue Knight, Lord Bertorion, with the holy sword, Signaltin, which had been passed down in the royal family for generations. With the battles turning fiercer and fiercer, and Bertorion had come close to losing his life several times, Alaia just couldn't stand it and presented him with the royal family's greatest treasure, the holy sword, Signaltin.

To Alaia, that was an act equivalent to confessing her love for Bertorion. No matter how much power the sword held, no matter that Bertorion was the commander for the reborn regular army, presenting the royal family's greatest treasure to a mere knight was unheard off. So by doing that, it revealed Alaia's true feelings.

But even then, the two didn't speak up about their feelings. They simply couldn't. A princess and a knight; even though they were both nobles, that immeasurably large gap stood in their way. It was a love that would never be realized or permitted.

“It looks like we can relax for now.”

Ruth smiled while looking up at the stage and then whispered to Theia.

In this play there were three climaxes, and this scene was one of them. In the past, it had been said that the quality of the story hinged on the quality of those three climaxes, and fortunately, this scene came up as good enough. That's what Ruth had meant when she said that they could relax.

“That's… true, but…”

However, it seemed like something hadn't satisfied Theia. She looked up on the stage with a gloomy expression.

“Was there something you didn't like?”

“Yes…”

When Ruth asked that, Theia began muttering about the complex feelings inside her. Theia was only revealing that she didn't have an answer herself because it was Ruth asking.

“That is the Blue Knight and the Silver Princess… they've reached a sufficient level for amateurs… but… something's…”

“Something is missing?”

“…”

Theia nodded without saying a word. She was unable to give words to the gloomy feelings inside her small chest.

The play was reaching completion; Harumi was settling in as the Silver Princess and Koutarou was behaving like the Blue Knight that Theia had imagined.

But as she looked at Koutarou, Theia felt like something was missing. The more he acted like the Blue Knight, the stronger that sensation got.

“It's strange. He is sufficiently acting like the Blue Knight, but I can't help but feel that something is missing.”

As Theia impatiently said so, she looked up at Koutarou on the stage while tilting her head. And for each time she racked her brains, her golden hair fluttered through the air.

The Ideal Knight

“Your highness…”

Seeing Theia like that, Ruth was astonished for an instant before returning to her smile. It was an expression similar to an older sister checking on her little sister's homework. Ruth knew what the emotion Theia was feeling was.

“Your highness, that is probably because the one up there is the Blue Knight.”

“Because it's the Blue Knight? What do you mean?”

This time, Theia looked at Ruth in astonishment.

“It's just what I said. You are probably dissatisfied because the one standing up on stage is the Blue Knight, your highness.”

“What a foolish thing to say. Why wouldn't the Blue Knight stand up on the stage in a play about the Blue Knight.”

Theia rejected Ruth's words and looked up on the stage again. Her expression was still distorted by impatience. Looking at Theia like that, Ruth objected on the inside.

No, your highness. You are dissatisfied because the one standing on that stage is the Blue Knight…

It was the desire that Theia hadn't noticed, but Ruth had, since they had grown up like sisters.

Theia originally admired the Blue Knight because she wanted a splendid Knight just like him to help her and her mother. The strongest knight that Theia knew off was the Blue Knight, that's why she wanted his help. Reflecting her desire, she had written this manuscript where the strongest knight could shine.

But now, the strongest Knight that Theia could think of now had changed to someone else. So to reflect her desire, that someone else should be standing on the stage, but the Blue Knight was still there instead. That was why Theia had problems accepting it.

And one more thing… the heroine shouldn't be the Silver Princess… right, your highness?

Theia's ideal knight was someone who stood next to her and protected Theia's mother, who was serving as the empress, together. And since that ideal knight was now with the Silver Princess, there was no way Theia could accept it.

“In other words, her highness wants to be with Satomi-sama and…”

“Did you say something?”

“No, not really.”

But Ruth didn't tell Theia the answer she had come up with. It was an answer that Theia had to reach herself. If someone else were to tell her, the answer wouldn't hold any meaning.

Part 2

Ruth was trying to bring Koutarou over to Theia's side. For better or for worse, right now, Koutarou was the source of Theia's energy.

“Satomi-sama, a towel.”

“Thanks, Ruth-san.”

So Ruth used bringing Koutarou a towel to wipe off his sweat as an excuse to approach him. Unaware of that, Koutarou expressed his gratitude for her consideration and accepted the towel.

“And for you too, Harumi-sama.”

“Thank you.”

She also handed Harumi a towel at the same time. Although she wanted to talk to Koutarou, Ruth was the kind of girl that didn't forget her surroundings.

“Sorry for all your consideration, Ruth-san.”

“No, this is my job after all.”

What's wrong with Theia…?

While Ruth was talking to Harumi, Koutarou was looking at Theia.

Theia was sitting on a large cardboard box in the corner of the gym and with her shoulders, shaking her legs. She was staring down on the ground past her legs.

Koutarou was used to Theia always coming flying at him after he came down from the stage, so he found Theia's current behavior unexpected. Because of that, his hand wiping off the sweat stopped.

“Satomi-sama, do you have a moment, there's something I want to talk about!”

That was when Ruth, who had finished talking to Harumi, tried to catch his attention. She had been wanting to talk to Koutarou for a while now.

“Sorry Ruth, can we talk later? There's something I need to do…”

However, Koutarou didn't respond in the way Ruth had wanted and began walking away from her.

“Ah, w-wait a moment, Satomi-sama!”

Ruth wanted to talk to Koutarou about a very important matter to her. It was something that she didn't want ignored whatsoever, so Ruth raised her voice for once and tried to stop Koutarou.

“This is an important— Ah…”

However, Ruth stopped mid-sentence when she noticed where Koutarou was heading.

“Satomi-sama… how…”

Ruth put her hands on her hips and let out a large sigh. Whether she was surprised or happy, that was the only thing to come out of her mouth.

How do you understand me so well…

Ruth had gotten angry when Koutarou had ignored her important discussion. But in fact, Koutarou was already on his way to realize her wish before she could talk to him.

“Really… that's why the role of the Blue Knight is not enough for you…”

The Ideal Knight

Ruth was filled with a warm feeling as she stared at Koutarou's back. The joy that filled her chest was deep and intense. Although she had gotten angry for an instant, she was now so happy she could break into dance.

That's because Koutarou was heading the direction of Theia.

Please take care of her highness, Satomi-sama…

However, she couldn't actually break into dance. She couldn't ruin her master's important moment. So Ruth sealed her own mouth and closed her fist as if to hold back her joy.

"Hey, what are you spacing out for?"

Having approached up to her side, Koutarou casually pulled on her cheeks with both hands.

"Eh…?"

Theia's glance slowly shifted upwards. This was when she noticed Koutarou.

"What, I'm not doing anything."

"That's not what your face says."

Hearing Theia's answer, Koutarou began seriously worrying.

This might be a serious case…

Koutarou was still pulling on Theia's cheeks, but she wasn't complaining at all. Like a sulking child, she turned her face away and looked down on the ground. With her high amount of pride, her just doing that was enough for Koutarou to realize that something was wrong.

"It's my face, let me do with it what I please."

"Tell me, I won't understand if you're just going to frown."

Koutarou went from pulling on her cheeks to pushing and rubbing them together with his palms. Although his actions had no meaning, he felt that it was better than just letting her frown.

"There's nothing to tell you. Even though this is all your doing, it's obvious you can't solve the problem."

"Hm? What's that supposed to mean?"

Hearing what Theia said, Koutarou stopped moving her hands and instead stared into her eyes.

Oh crap…

Since Koutarou was holding onto her face, she couldn't turn her face away, but Theia quickly looked away from Koutarou.

"I don't want to say."

"Tell me. If you don't I'll just keep doing this."

Since Theia didn't answer him, Koutarou began moving his hands again. Theia's soft cheeks began changing shape in his palms.

"I understand, I'll tell you, so just stop."

"Good, as long as you understand."

Since Koutarou was being overly persistent, Theia finally caved. She sighed before she began explaining what she understood herself.

"Nine months have passed since I came to this planet. But you haven't treated me with respect even once. If anything, you're treating Sakuraba Harumi more like a princess than you are me."

The Ideal Knight

In order for Theia to complete her trial, Koutarou needed to swear his loyalty to her. However, Koutarou showed no signs of doing so. And to Theia, Koutarou was treating Harumi much more like a princess than her.

That's right, she was worrying about something similar during Christmas as well…

Hearing her words, Koutarou remembered her worries at the Christmas party. At that time, she was worrying whether or not she was worthy of standing above others.

However, her worries this time around were strictly different. However, Koutarou wasn't smart enough to notice that. So because of that, a slight difference in perception occurred between Koutarou and Theia. Since Koutarou was different from Ruth, that was unavoidable.

Even then, there was something common between them. So Koutarou honestly spoke his mind.

“That's not true. There's no way I'm not showing you any respect. That's just your misunderstanding.”

Koutarou shook his head. Theia looked up, but her eyes were full of doubt.

“Don't lie. Do you even know what you're doing right now?”

“I'm playing around with your face.”

“And that's how you show respect to a princess!?”

Theia shouted out furiously. Raising her well-shaped eyebrows, she revealed a very angry expression. If he was treating her like a princess, Koutarou wouldn't do as he pleased with Theia's face. That was the reason behind Theia believing that Koutarou wasn't showing her any respect.

And this isn't just limited to now. In school, in the city, in the room and onboard the Blue Knight; Koutarou was always treating her this roughly. And he would keep repeating something to the effect of 'Don't just make me your vassal.’

So having Koutarou say 'that's not true,’ Theia's dissatisfaction only grew.

“In the end, you don't see me as princess Theiamillis at all!”

“Was that the case… well that was my bad…”

Koutarou stopped moving his hand.

“Eh…?”

Koutarou easily moved his hands away from Theia's face. He then sat down on the same cardboard box as Theia.

“Hey, Theia.”

“What?”

Theia responded in a bad mood and turned her face the other way. She still hadn't calmed down yet.

“Because of some circumstances I can't swear my loyalty or hand over the room to you right away… But there's no way I don't acknowledge that you're a princess.”

“You liar!! Quit coming up with obvious random remarks to spout out!!”

Theia turned around to glare at Koutarou for a moment as she spat out her words at him before turning away once more. It looked like she didn't believe a word Koutarou said.

“You've always been calling me useless princess or pathetic princess all this time!!”

The Ideal Knight

“It's true that's what I felt at first.”

Koutarou and Theia's first meeting had been a terrible one. Theia only considered the humanity on Earth to be neanderthals and Koutarou believed Theia was an evil alien set on invading the planet.

“I could never have imagined swearing loyalty to you.”

“See!”

Theia spat those words out and puffed up her cheeks.

That kind of action revealed her change, but having lost her cool, Theia didn't notice. In the past she probably would have pulled out her weapons and torn down the entire gym.

“But, a while back there was a time when I saw you act like a princess.”

“Eh…”

Like a popped balloon, the air in her puffed up cheeks vanished.

“T-That's a lie!”

Theia expression changed repeatedly and she looked at Koutarou with side glances. If Ruth had been there, she probably couldn't have discerned the worry, joy, doubts and expectations from her various expressions.

“As if I could believe that!”

“I understand how you feel. That's because I feel the same way.”

Koutarou balanced his elbow on his knee and supported his head with his palm before sighing.

That's right. When I think about, I still can't believe it…

At first Koutarou had determined never to swear loyalty to Theia no matter what. But his determination had wavered during the nine months they had spent together.

Having been clashing intensely all this time, Koutarou had become able to see her true feelings. Now he knew that behind her strong-willed mask was a gentle and lonely girl.

That hadn't been the only thing to change Koutarou's feelings. When Koutarou, Sanae or Kiriha had been in trouble, Theia had come to help, even though they wanted to defeat one another at first. At the time, she seemed reluctant, but now it was obvious she had seriously worried for them.

On top of accepting her opponents, Theia was trying to win room 106 fair and square as a princess. Knowing that, Koutarou could no longer deny that she was indeed a princess. It was a large change of heart that had only been able to develop because the two of them had matured.

“Theia, you've changed. You're completely different from who you were in spring. Before I knew it, you were no longer a pathetic princess or Tulip.”

“Ah…”

That was when Theia noticed for the first time, that a long time had passed since Koutarou last called her Tulip.

When? When did Koutarou start calling me Theia?

Theia's heart began pounding and she scanned through her memories, going backwards in time, confirming every time Koutarou had called her Theia.

It's possible that Koutarou had been thinking of her as a princess since he had called her Theia for the first time.

That desire fiercely stirred up her feelings, and for each time she recalled Koutarou calling her Theia, her heart beat got faster.

Since when…?

And after a while she reached a certain memory.

“Theia! Trust me! I'm your knight, remember!?”

That was back just before the performance of the first play when Clan had attacked. They were the words Koutarou shouted out when Theia had lost her cool.

Since that day, Koutarou had all but stopped calling her Tulip, and had instead begun calling her Theia.

That's right. That's when I stopped too!

The same was true for Theia. Since that day, she had stopped calling Koutarou pleb.

That was because she had acknowledged Koutarou as someone worthy of being her vassal. That night, she had visited Koutarou in his sleep and made him her knight on her own accord, and awarded him with the sword she named herself, Saguratin.

How foolish! How could I have not noticed!? That day we had both acknowledged each other!!

It was probably something they had both overlooked due to that lack of experience. Since neither of them refused to back down when staring at each other, the only thing they had changed after acknowledging one another was the way they were calling them. It was the same now. Since it was hard for them to speak face to face, Koutarou was sitting down next to Theia.

“So if you are really against our current relationship, then I don't mind changing how we associate.”

“Change how we associate…?”

“Thinking about it, I'm always doing rude stuff like this.”

The Ideal Knight

The Ideal Knight

While rubbing Theia's cheeks, Koutarou looked at what he was doing again.

That's right. Unlike Sakuraba-senpai who's only acting a princess, Theia is a genuine one…

Because their meeting had been terrible, their current rough relationship had been born. But in reality, Theia was a foreign, or strictly speaking an alien, princess, so she should be treated more courteously. Yelling at Theia or playing with her cheeks wasn't something you could do to a princess.

It's rude, it's stupid…

Noticing that, Koutarou finally understood the unmeasurable gap in their status.

“Koutarou…”

With her eyes wide open in surprise, Koutarou was still rubbing her cheeks around. Normally Theia would probably thrust his hand aside, telling him not to belittle her. But when Koutarou had asked her if she wanted him to stop, the idea of pushing his hand away didn't occur.

This kind of association will end…?

Theia felt a deep sense of loss. Just a moment ago, she had wanted Koutarou to treat her more like a princess, but now she had changed her mind.

In Theia's mind, her memories of the days she had spent with Koutarou popped up.

The fist fight that had erupted after Koutarou had stolen her side dish for dinner. The all-nighter versus gaming session that had happened because of a simple stubborn rivalry. The tennis match that had continued until they were completely worn out. The practice that had continued without breaks, despite their respective complaints.

They would clash on an almost daily basis. However, when they really needed it, they would lend each other a hand. There was no end to the memories that filled Theia's small chest.

If Koutarou starts treating me like a princess, this kind of thing will stop too…

If Koutarou began treating Theia like the princess of a country, she would never experience events like the memories filling up her chest again. A princess and an alien; between them was a helplessly large gap.

No! I don't want that!!

However, Theia couldn't accept that. She wanted more memories like that. If she put an end to it now, she wouldn't be able to stand it.

What's wrong with me…? Even though I want Koutarou to be a knight, I don't want him to treat me like a princess…

That's why Theia noticed that she didn't want Koutarou to treat her like a princess. It was something similar but completely different.

“I—”

Theia tried to say something. But not even she knew what.

“I—”

The conflicting emotions within her chest, she wanted Koutarou to treat her with respect, but not to treat her like a princess. Since she wasn't sure why, the following words couldn't leave her mouth.

What is this…? Just what do I want from Koutarou…?

Just as she was perplexed by her own feelings.

“…Actually, I'd rather not.”

As Koutarou said that, he suddenly put force in the hands holding Theia's cheeks, locking her head in place.

“Eh?”

And before she could question it, Koutarou began shaking her head.

“W-What are you doing all of a sudden!?”

This irritated even Theia and she yelled at Koutarou with raised eyebrows. Because of that, the hazy feelings brewing up inside her vanished with her yell.

“I really can't show any class. I just can't come up with an elegant way of cheering you up.”

Smiling wryly, Koutarou continued shaking Theia's head.

In the end, I really am a commoner…

Koutarou knew that it would be better if he treated Theia like the Silver Princess, if he acted like the Blue Knight in the manuscript. But he just couldn't imagine himself doing that.

Or it could be that while I acknowledge Theia as a princess, I want her to stay as Tulip at the same time…

Looking at the golden hair that fluttered between his hands, Koutarou smiled wryly at his convenient ideas.

“N-No one, no matter the person, regardless of status, would get cheered up by this!!”

“Really? You seem quite energetic to me.”

Besides…

Koutarou glanced at Ruth behind him while moving his arms. While shaking Theia's head, he recalled his previous discussion with Ruth. In the past, she had said that she wanted Theia to live as a normal girl for a while.

Treating Theia in a suitable fashion would divert from Ruth's wish of treating her like a normal girl. So even with that in mind, Koutarou believed it was best to continue like this.

“T-That's not it at all!! Ooooooooooooohhhh!!”

“Oh, so energetic.”

Theia struggled between Koutarou's hands. By now, the two of them had returned to normal.

This is for the better. Well, this isn't, but it's for the better…

Theia still hadn't found an answer. But even with it, things wouldn't change. So while Theia was getting irritated about being shaken about, she felt relief and joy at the same time.

The only person who knew what Theia wanted, was quietly watching over them from a distance.

“Just one more step, your highness. Just take one more step, and jump in with all your might…”

If Theia realized her feelings and showed it, Koutarou would surely respond to her. There was no way he wouldn't, Ruth was certain of that. So she gently watched over the two, full of faith.

At that moment, a whispering voice could be heard next to Ruth.

“So that's princess Theiamillis… owner of Saguratin…”

The owner of that voice was Harumi. She had a crest in the shape of a sword glowing on her forehead as she looked at Koutarou and Theia. Her appearance was dignified and beautiful, and like when she stood on top of the stage, she had a mysterious atmosphere to her.

The Ideal Knight

“And… she's Koutarou-sama's princess…”

However, no one around noticed Harumi's voice. Contrary to her seemingly large existence, her whispering voice was seemingly unhearable.

Answer and Prayer

Part 1

Sunday, January 24

A strong spotlight shone on Harumi and Koutarou.

Harumi was wearing a pure white dress and a silvery tiara. Her expression was filled with affection as she stared at Koutarou. Since the other lights had been shut off, it was as if Harumi's body was glowing in the dark.

“…I asked you not to come, countless times.”

Harumi's smiled vanished for an instant as she criticized Koutarou.

“Excuse me, but to me it sounded like a cry for help.”

In response, Koutarou smiled instead.

Wearing a metallic armor, Koutarou was facing Harumi. It was the replica armor that controlled Theia's battleship, the Blue Knight. The blue armor was large and made Koutarou's body, that was big to begin with, look even more gigantic and powerful.

“Thank you for coming, Lord Bertorion.”

Harumi smiled once more. Unlike the smile from before, this was the kind of smile she would only show someone special.

“My life and my sword exist for her highness.”

Koutarou lightly smiled and nodded towards Harumi. He swung the sword in his hand about before he slowly put it back in its sheath.

The tip of the blade drew an elegant circle. To the spectators, it looked like silver moon.

It was now Sunday, January 24, the day the play would be performed.

Fortunately, despite being set on a weekend, a lot of students, their families and locals flocked to watch it. Because of that, all of the prepared seats had been filled and people were standing up to watch. Because of how popular the previous play had been, the expectations for this play were huge.

And living up to the expectations, the performance was proceeding smoothly. The acting, impressive action scenes and large scale contraptions were all well received. The audience had been stirred up several times.

The scene that had gotten the audience the most worked up in particular had been the scene where the Fire Dragon Emperor, Alunaya, flew above the stage. Yurika who enjoyed being in the spotlight had gotten full of herself and began rampaging around the edge of the stage, causing children in the audience to start crying.

And such, without any major troubles, the story was reaching its conclusion. Only two scenes now remained: the coronation scene where the Silver Princess ascended the emperor's throne, and the final scene where the Silver Princess and the Blue Knight parted.

With their scene finished, Koutarou and Harumi returned backstage, entering a battlefield. The set pieces that had been used were filling up the area and a large amount of people were moving around.

“Drop the curtains for now! We're changing the set!”

“High beam A-4 is gone!”

Answer and Prayer

“What do we change it with?”

“Clothes! Where are Sakuraba-san's change of clothes!?”

“Change it with the coronation scene! Hurry up!”

“Make up for it with B-4 next to it, watch out for the difference in angle though!”

“Are all the aristocrats here!?”

“They're here!”

“I don't know!”

“Are they, are they not?”

“I said they're here!”

Although a procedure for how to deal with scene changes had been put in place, things weren't going as planned during the actual performance. According to their original schedule, they wouldn't have to rush this much, but in the end it happened. However, since the play was proceeding properly, they were doing good for amateurs.

“Saaa~tomi-saaa~n, Saaa~kuraba-senpaaa~i.”

While the backstage was overwhelming Harumi and Koutarou, Yurika passed by still hung up by wires. She was still wearing her Alunaya costume and moved her limbs and tail to appeal to the two.

She had no more scenes in the play, but it was next to impossible for Yurika wearing the giant Alunaya outfit to move around backstage. Because of that, Yurika, still hung up by wires, was being carried off to the back of the gym where luggage was being deposited.

“Everyone seems to be having a hard time…”

After seeing Yurika off, Harumi looked around the backstage once more and sighed. Just looking at the state the backstage was in, anyone could tell how hard of a time the staff must have been having. Harumi earnestly felt that everyone's hard work was amazing.

“This is not the time to act like it's not your problem.”

“Eh?”

While Koutarou was smiling wryly at Harumi's amazed appearance, the stage manager came from nowhere and casually grabbed Harumi's arm.

“Kya!?”

“There you are, Sakuraba-san, hurry up! We have to change your outfit!”

“R-Right! I'll see you later, Satomi-kun.”

“Leave that for later, just hurry Sakuraba-san!”

Harumi was forcibly pulled away by the stage manager.

“Ahaha, you seem to be having a hard time yourself, Sakuraba-senpai…”

Looking at Harumi's back, Koutarou laughed. Unlike Koutarou who had no appearance in the next scene, Harumi did. Since it was the scene where the Silver Princess was crowned empress, she had to wear a crown, robe and a scepter. Like the other staff, Harumi didn't have much time. She wasn't in a position where she could take it easy.

Theia and Ruth were also in the direction Harumi was being pulled in. Since Theia had the role of the Silver Princess's little sister, the Golden Princess, she had an appearance in the

coronation scene. So Theia was waiting next to Ruth wearing a different formal dress from normal.

“Move it, Satomi! Get out the way!”

“Oops, sorry!”

The large props team carrying a set piece came moving through. Since Koutarou was in their way he hurriedly moved.

“Move it, Satomi-kun, I'm in a hurry!”

“S-Sorry!”

However, a different staff member was moving through the area he had dodged to. Koutarou quickly moved away again, however the previous event repeated itself several times. There was no place in the backstage where Koutarou could rest when he had nothing to do.

“Geez.”

“What are you going to do, Koutarou?”

“I guess we don't have a choice, let's go to the back of the gym with Yurika.”

“Roger.”

Koutarou followed after Yurika alongside Sanae who had been supporting him through the performance.

Koutarou's next appearance was about ten minutes from now, so he was better off practicing his lines behind the gym rather than standing there and getting in the way of the staff.

“Ah, Satomi-kun, if you're heading off to the luggage deposit, please take Yurika with you.”

“*roar*”

“I got it.”

“All you need to do is pull on this.”

On his way there, Koutarou received a rope from a girl from the special effects team. The rope was attached to Yurika's outfit.

“Thanks, Satomi-kun. See you later.”

“Yeah.”

The girl who gave Koutarou the rope returned the way they had come from. She had no time for rest, her next job was waiting.

“Everyone sure is working hard…”

“Yeah.”

“*roar**roar*”

Seeing the girl off, Koutarou told himself to give it his all and pumped himself up. Koutarou's next appearance was the most important last scene. The quality of that scene could affect the outcome of the entire play.

“Let's go, Yurika.”

“*roar*”

“Still, that's a pretty pathetic appearance…”

“*roar**roar*”

Answer and Prayer

Koutarou and Sanae pulled on Yurika's rope and left the backstage. It was an odd sight that looked like a giant dragon being taken for a walk.

Part 2

“I'm letting you down.”

“Ahhh, wait, please wait!”

“Ei.”

“Kyaaaaaaaaaa!!”

Yurika screamed. When Koutarou looked up, he saw her fly by and crash into the ground with the Alunaya outfit she was wearing.

“Owowowow…”

“S-Sorry.”

“Don't tell me you're sorry! You should have let me down more gently!”

“I didn't think it would drop you so fast.”

Koutarou had left Yurika to Sanae and went over his lines before the last scene. But it seemed that decision was a mistake as Yurika laid on the ground with her limbs spread out.

After getting to the back of the gym, Sanae pressed a button to release the rope holding Yurika up. But since Sanae had pressed the button before she had lowered Yurika to the ground, she ended up crashing into the ground from about a meter high. Although the height hadn't been that dangerous to fall from, the costume she was wearing was quite heavy, and the damage Yurika suffered could not be called minor.

“What are they doing…”

Koutarou sighed and placed his Kabutonga bookmark into the manuscript and closed it before jumping off the set piece he was using as a chair.

As Koutarou landed, his armor produced a loud noise and gave off the impression that the armor was quite heavy. However Koutarou walked as if he couldn't feel its weight. Since it was a powered armor, it didn't obstruct Koutarou's movements. On the contrary of its classic look, it was a mass of advanced Forthorthe science.

“Hey, are you okay, Yurika?”

Koutarou put the manuscript in his armor and presented Yurika with his left hand.

“I'm nooo~t.”

Yurika tried to grab his hand, but the damage had been more significant than she thought. Her hand lost momentum halfway through and fell to the ground. Still lying down with limbs spread out, Yurika then began crying.

“Hey now…”

Koutarou had been amazed by Yurika at the time, but considering what happened next, not grabbing Koutarou's hand was the correct choice.

“Look out, Koutarou!!”

By the time Sanae had warned him, the heavy metal particles fired through electromagnetism were already flying towards Koutarou. The beam that had built up energy until just moments before it went out of control grazed the arm Koutarou had stretched out towards Yurika.

“Uwah!?”

“Kyaaaaaaa!?”

Answer and Prayer

Koutarou and Yurika were blinded by the sudden beam and following small explosion. However, the only damage had been blowing away armor around Koutarou's left arm. Fortunately, neither Koutarou's arm nor Yurika who had been nearby were injured. If Yurika had grabbed his hand, her hand might have blown off alongside his armor. In other words, Yurika had survived thanks to her lack of guts. The only thing Koutarou felt was a scorching heat on his arm, he could be called extremely lucky.

“Ah, hot hot hot!”

“Koutarou, it's her! The girl that attacked Theia in the previous play—”

“That's right, it's me!”

Both Sanae's voice and the person who fired the beam's voice could be heard coming from above Koutarou. When Koutarou looked up, the smoke from the explosion had cleared and he could see someone's appearance in the clear blue sky.

“Prepare yourself, fake Blue Knight! The moon of Schweiger reflected on the surface in the water will be taking your life!!”

“She's-!?”

Koutarou had seen her before.

She was wearing a black and white luxurious dress with antique glasses on her face. In her hand she held an unsophisticated beam rifle while flying in the sky.

“My name is Clariossa! Clariossa Daora Schweiger Meltsfen Foa Forthorthe! Carve this prideful name into your mind as you pass through the gates of hell, fake Blue Knight!!”

It was Theia's rival Clan, Forthorthe's second princess.

There were two reasons why Clan was attacking Koutarou at this moment.

The first reason was that Koutarou had separated from Theia and Harumi.

During the coronation scene, both the Golden Princess and the Silver Princess would be on stage. However, the Blue Knight had no appearance, so Koutarou would naturally separate from the two. Separating Koutarou from Theia who had overwhelming firepower and Harumi who was an unknown foe was an important point that would affect the result of Clan's attack.

The second reason was that if she killed Koutarou now, it would make Theia grieve tremendously.

The following scene after the coronation was the parting scene between the Blue Knight and the Silver Princess. If she could dispose of Koutarou before then, the Blue Knight would be missing for the most important scene of the play. Since Clan was very well aware of Theia's attachment to the Blue Knight, she timed her attack so it would do the most damage to the play.

And with those two requirements met, Koutarou had come to the rather unpopulated back of the gym. Of course, Clan wouldn't overlook that golden opportunity.

At the same time that Koutarou spotted Clan, he put his hand on the sword by his waist.

The treasured sword, Saguratin, that Theia had given to Koutarou had protected them several times.

“You again! You're targeting Theia again!?”

Koutarou pulled his sword from its sheath and, following the teachings of Forthorthe's old school sword fighting, he drew a large circle with the blade tip.

Holding it feels somewhat off.

Answer and Prayer

As Koutarou posed with the sword in both hands, he readjusted the hold on his left hand. Koutarou had always been training to use the sword while wearing the armor, so he felt somewhat uncomfortable while holding the sword with his left arm bare.

“I'm aiming for Theiamillis-san!? You're wrong, fake Blue Knight!!”

Clan grinned and grabbed her beam rifle with both hands. Even though she was floating in the air, Clan seemed to be fixed to her position; she wasn't budging or floating an inch. From several meters up in the sky, Clan accurately took aim for Koutarou's head.

“My prey for today is you! I'm going to defeat you before I get to Theiamillis-san!!”

“Me!?”

“Of course! Just you standing in front of me alive is a stain on my life!”

While Koutarou was surprised, Clan squeezed the trigger.

As she did, a beam came flying out from the fully charged rifle. Although a beam attack's effect was greatly reduced when firing in the atmosphere, at this kind of range, that flaw was almost non-existent. The beam approached Koutarou with most of the energy it had when fired.

It's fast!

Koutarou was instinctively amazed, the beam was flying towards much faster than he had thought. Much faster than the beams fired by her in the past. This was thanks to Clan's remodeling of the rifle.

“Tsk!”

Because of that, although Koutarou moved to dodge, he wasn't going to make it in time.

“Leave it to me!”

However, that's when something strange happened. Having jumped away to dodge, Koutarou's body suddenly began accelerating. It was as if something invisible had pushed him away with all of their might. Thanks to that, Koutarou avoided a direct hit from the beam, and it instead drilled into the ground and created a charred hole.

“What was that!?”

“Koutarou!!”

“Was that you, Sanae!? You saved me!!”

Clan had been surprised, but Koutarou hadn't. He knew that Sanae had used her spiritual powers to send him flying and saved him. Koutarou landed in a calm fashion, and using the momentum, began running at full speed. Although Clan had gotten the first shot off because Koutarou had been distracted by their conversation, Koutarou wasn't planning on letting her dictate the momentum. He had begun running to make it harder for Clan to aim at him and to close the distance between them.

“Curse you, quit running around!”

Two more flashes come out from Clan's rifle. Since Koutarou had anticipated these attacks, he swiftly curved his body and dodged the beams. Because of that, he was able to avoid two direct hits, however, one of the beams glanced his armor.

“Whoa!?”

Although it had just grazed him, he could feel a large impact. Not only had the beam's speed increased, but its power had too.

“Dammit, that gun is completely different from the last time!”

Answer and Prayer

The beam cannon's performance had been increased in every aspect.

Looks like I'll be in trouble if I think it'll be the same as last time…

Koutarou clicked his tongue and closed in even further on Clan. Closing the distance was important for him for both defense and offense's sake.

"I told you to leave it to me."

Sanae laughed next to his ear, before Koutarou had realized it, she was already hanging onto his back.

"Sanae?"

"Mine and Koutarou's friendship power won't lose to the likes of her!"

When Sanae shouted that, Koutarou's view changed greatly.

"This is…"

Overlapping with what he could normally see, living creatures could be seen with a white light around them. And by focusing on that light, he could faintly tell what that creature was doing and was planning on doing.

This was the power that Sanae had given Koutarou. Doing the reverse of when Sanae could taste what Koutarou ate, she transmitted her spiritual senses to Koutarou. Thanks to that, Koutarou could faintly tell where Clan was aiming and when she would fire. There wasn't something as convenient as this when it came to a fight.

"Ehehehe~, and that's not all today♪"

"Take this!!"

At the same time Sanae cheerfully laughed, Clan repeatedly fired. Although it became harder to dodge because of the number of shots, Koutarou was able to avoid all the beams using quick steps.

What is this?

Koutarou was puzzled as he easily dodged the beams.

To Koutarou, it felt like the beams got slower all of a sudden and his body felt surprisingly light. He felt like time was moving 50% slower.

"Sanae, could this be your doing too?"

"You got it♪ Remember to compliment me after this is over♪"

Sanae responded to Koutarou's question with a bright smile. Happy that Koutarou was surprised, she strengthened the grip around his neck.

"Our strong bond has created a miracle!"

Sanae's spiritual powers had been the reason behind Koutarou's increased speed. Normally, she used this power to massage him, but by opening up his blood vessels and sending her energy through him, she could sharpen his senses and increase his reflex speed. And since Sanae who was hanging onto his back was removing any unnecessary mental noise, his movements became a lot more accurate.

Since he could tell when and where Clan would fire, Koutarou had no problems dodging her beams. That was only a given since he would start dodging before she even fired.

"You haven't fully possessed me, right?"

"Hmm~, I guess you could call it that."

Answer and Prayer

Orders from Koutarou's brain was sent throughout his body via Sanae. The current situation could be described as Sanae taking over Koutarou's body, but moving as he wanted.

“I guess I have to make some sacrifices to survive, but that's scary…”

“It's okay. I love you after all♪”

Koutarou jumped with all his might towards Clan who was above him. He was planning on swatting her down with the sword he was grasping in two hands. Clan was high enough so that Koutarou would normally be unable to reach her, but thanks to the powers given to him by the armor and Sanae, he could easily reach her.

“Well done! However-!”

Attempting to distance herself from Koutarou, Clan rose up further into the sky. Because of that, Koutarou's sword only hit air.

“It missed!?”

Koutarou then continued flying towards the ground and landed. However, the moment he landed, Clan rained down beams upon him.

“Koutarou!”

“I know!”

The mantle Koutarou was wearing on top of his armor for the last scene was burnt and the armor reported of minor damage. Clan aimed for the moment when he was landing, so Koutarou was unable to avoid damage, even with Sanae's help.

“Koutarou, let's fly too! This armor, can fly right!?”

“So I hear, but I don't know how!”

“You're kidding!!”

The armor Koutarou was wearing served to control the battleship the Blue Knight. Since the battleships pilot would normally wear it, the armor naturally came with all the functions a space suit had. Flying through the skies was one of those functions, but since Koutarou was only using the armor for the performance, he didn't know anything unrelated to that. The legendary Blue Knight could supposedly fly through the skies, but they couldn't use the armor's powers in the play.

Because of that, Koutarou currently had no way of counterattacking at the moment. Since Clan was attacking from out of his reach, he was helpless. While dodging the beams, Koutarou racked his brain, trying to come up with a solution to this problem.

“Curse you! Do you have eyes in the back of your head or something!?”

In response, Clan got more frustrated. Although Koutarou could no longer counterattack because of the height, her beams could no longer hit the fast moving Koutarou. The rifle was much easier to handle compared to the beam cannon from before, but Koutarou was moving much faster than the data she had on him from the previous fight, so despite her accuracy working together with the targeting computer, she still couldn't score an effective hit on Koutarou. The distance between her and Koutarou and Sanae keeping a guard of Koutarou's blind spots were the primary reason for the lack of hits.

“In that case!”

Annoyed, Clan touched the button attached to the body of the rifle. When she did, the information flowing from the rifle to her bracelet was cut off for a moment before hurriedly sending data again. She had changed the rifle's attack mode and rebooted the targeting computer.

“Not even you can dodge this!”

Clan smiled as she pointed the muzzle of the rifle at Koutarou again. It was an amused smile similar to a cat cornering a mouse. If Koutarou saw it, he would definitely be reminded of when he had first met Theia. Clan was so confident in her next attack that it allowed her to smile like that.

“Koutarou, in that case, I'll fight her directly— Look out, run, Koutarou!!”

Sanae was the first one to notice it, and she hurriedly warned Koutarou.

Up until now, whenever Clan had attacked, Koutarou and Sanae could sense her hostility, represented by small circles a few centimeters in diameter. The circles corresponded to the anticipated diameter of the beam and Clan's aim, so by moving his body away from the circles, the beams would miss.

“What!? That's—”

“Quit talking and run! You can't avoid this—”

“You're too slow, fake Blue Knight!!”

Before Koutarou could take evasive maneuvers, Clan pulled the trigger.

I see, this is what she meant!!

Koutarou sensed Clan's hostility shortly after Sanae did. What had appeared large circle several meters in diameter.

“TAAAAKEEEE THIIIIISSS!!”

A gigantic cone beam came flying out of the rifle’s barrel. It had been created by scattering the beam; it could be called a beam shotgun.

Although the width of the beam got larger when scattered, the amount of energy required to fire a shot increased and the effect of the beam was reduced. It was a useful method of attacking when surrounded by a large amount of enemies.

“Koutarou!”

Sanae closed her eyes and held onto to Koutarou, as if she was trying to protect him. But as a ghost, Sanae was unable to do so. The beam would pass through her body and scorch Koutarou. Knowing that, she felt just how powerless she really was.

“Dammit!”

Koutarou jumped with all of his might, trying to get out of the beam's range. However, completely dodging the attack seemed hopeless. If a normal beam was like a faucet, the scattered beam was similar to a shower. Although the total amount of water was the same, the range was completely different. Although the power dropped, Koutarou wasn't enough of an optimist to think he'd make it out unscathed.

It looked like the beam was about to hit Koutarou. However at that moment, the voices of two girls could be heard.

“Karama, Korama! Spiritual energy field at full power!”

“Blue Knight! Maneuver suit, activate battle mode! Override input and put emergency boosters on the back and legs at full thrust!”

Those two were Kiriha and Ruth, still wearing their outfits from the play. Kiriha was shouting while facing Koutarou and Sanae while Ruth was giving orders into her bracelet.

“Leave it to use Ho-!”

Answer and Prayer

“Karama-chan, Korama-chan!”

“Ho-, Sanae-chan, everything will be alright now Ho-!”

Simultaneously to the two girls appearing, two haniwas appeared next to Koutarou and Sanae. Responding to Kiriha's command, the two haniwas deployed a shield to protect Koutarou, Sanae and themselves.

“As you wish, my lady.”

There was one more change. After Ruth's bracelet responded like always, the back and leg parts of Koutarou's armor began spewing out flames.

They were the flames of the boosters the armor was equipped with. Normally, the armor would manipulate gravity, just like its barriers, to fly. However, when a large amount of thrust was required in the case of an emergency, boosters using conventional propellants were used as assistance. The boosters in the back and legs spewed out a large amount of flames and rapidly accelerated Koutarou's body forwards.

“Uooooo!? W-What!?”

“Kyaaaaaaa!!”

Being accelerated by the boosters overwhelming thrust, 90% of Koutarou's body had gotten out of the beam's range while Karama and Korama blocked the remaining 10% of his body with their barrier. Normally, their barrier was intended to defend against spiritual energy attacks, so it wasn't well fit for blocking something like a beam cannon. If the attack had been the normally concentrated beam instead, the haniwas would probably have been unable to block it. However, the haniwas’ barrier was enough to block a scattered beam like this one.

“More of them!? Pardomshiha and… that girl!!”

Clan was more irritated about Ruth and Kiriha's appearance than her attack being blocked. She recalled having suffered at the hands of Kiriha last time around, so she held a strong sense of hostility against her, second to only Koutarou and Theia.

“Koutarou!”

“Satomi-sama, are you alright!?”

As Koutarou landed while tearing up the ground, Kiriha and Ruth came running up to him. Cautious of their appearance, Clan gave Koutarou and the others a hateful glare, but she couldn't attack right away. Meanwhile, the haniwas got between Clan and Koutarou and the others, protecting them.

“You saved me.”

“I'm just glad you're safe, Satomi-sama.”

“Nice timing!”

“I was surprised when I got a warning about the armor’s left arm being damaged right after I got off the stage, Satomi-sama.”

Kiriha and Ruth had only gotten to the back of the gym because of the alarm set off by Ruth's bracelet. Since the armor Koutarou was wearing was equipment belonging to the Blue Knight, it was only obvious for a damage alert to reach its operator, Ruth. Having been alerted to the abnormal situation, Ruth and Kiriha, who had finished at the same time, hurriedly ran towards Koutarou.

“Koutarou, use this.”

Answer and Prayer

Unlike Ruth, Kiriha's expression remained unchanged and presented Koutarou with a blue gauntlet as Clan was glaring at them.

“This is the thing you used—”

Koutarou remembered seeing the gauntlet in his hand from before. Unlike the armor Koutarou was wearing, it had a somewhat Japanese feel to it. It was her personal weapon she had used to fight her out of control allies.

“That's right. When facing someone like that, you need a ranged weapon, right?”

Looking at Clan floating in the sky, Kiriha sensed that Koutarou would be at a disadvantage with only his sword, so she planned on giving him her gauntlet to compensate for his disadvantage. For better or for worse, the armor on Koutarou's left arm had been blown away, so it was convenient for defensive purposes as well. And since Koutarou felt uncomfortable holding the sword with his bare hands, it was useful in that sense as well.

There was also the method of Kiriha using this to cover him from the ground, but aiming for someone flying in the sky from below was hard. So Kiriha felt it was best that Koutarou used the weapon.

“Thanks, but how do I use this?”

“Don't worry. Sanae knows how.”

“I don't. I've never touched— actually, I think I can, Koutarou!”

Sanae revealed a big smile as Koutarou fit the gauntlet on his left hand. It was a smile fitting of a child that just found a new toy. The moment Koutarou touched the gauntlet, Sanae got a feel for its structure and completely understood how to use it. The weapon was easy to understand for someone who used spiritual energy, like Sanae.

“Right then, let's counterattack!”

While getting a feel for his left hand, Koutarou held his sword with his right hand.

“And then like this!”

Answer and Prayer

A glowing red fireball appeared in Koutarou's left hand, creating a powerful electromagnetic field around it. The field would shoot out small bolts of lightning from time to time and the red fire would grow stronger.

The flame and field were because of Sanae. Using the gauntlet that converted spiritual energy into elements, Sanae's immense spiritual energy created an almost inexhaustible supply of fire and electricity. The fireball was hot enough to scorch the armor of a spaceship, while the electricity created enough electromagnetism to overpower said armor's electromagnetic defenses and cause errors in its main system.

“Sanae-sama, please reduce the output of the fire and electricity a little. At this rate, Satomi-sama will be scorched first.”

“Ah, sorry.”

“Satomi-sama, I will remain here and provide support.”

“I'm counting on you.”

“Karama, Korama, stick with Koutarou. I'll give you further instructions when needed.”

“Understood Ho-!”

“Got it, Nee-san!

The two girls remained to back up Koutarou and Sanae, and on Koutarou's side were Karama and Korama. Koutarou and Sanae took to the front lines, Kiriha would assist them with her haniwas and Ruth would support Koutarou.

“…Ah, looks like they're serious…”

There was also one more person supporting Koutarou from the shadows. That was Yurika, who still lay collapsed inside Alunaya.

There was plenty of room inside the giant dragon costume. Yurika had called forth her magical cane and was secretly helping. As examples, she had cast a ward to keep people away, increased the armor's defensive powers, and increased the density of the air between Koutarou and Clan to get in the way of the beam amongst other things.

“Now then, the last scene is waiting, so let's hurry up and beat the villain and head for the happy ending!!”

Koutarou roared while glaring at Clan floating in the sky. There was no way he could lose. Koutarou was certain of it now that he gained several powers.

Close-range fighting, long-range fighting, information and magic. Although it was a hastily constructed team, they had a splendid balance between offense and defense.

Nine months had passed since the invaders had appeared in Corona House's room 106. The power that had scared him back then were now being used to protect him.

Part 3

Although Ruth hadn't had the chance to shine in close-combat fighting yet, her true value was revealed when she began supporting Koutarou from the back.

“Kiriha-sama, I have finished analyzing the electromagnetic pattern before Clan-sama fires!”

“Can you communicate the timing to Karama and Korama!?”

Using the sensors dispatched from the Blue Knight, Ruth gathered all kinds of data and analyzed it. She then filtered the data for the information that would be useful for Koutarou. The information she had ranged from weapon and defensive performances to the surrounding geographical features. She even had information about Koutarou's and Clan's various habits.

“I can use the laser communication positioned on the shoulder area of Satomi-sama's armor!”

“In that case, there's no need to worry about any jamming!! Do it right away, Ruth!! You heard us, right, Karama, Korama!?”

“Got it! Setting one of the spiritual energy field triggers to receive it Ho-!”

“Ruth-chan, you're a big help Ho-!”

The filtered information was then processed by Kiriha and she made the appropriate decisions. The armor's settings changed to adapt to Koutarou's fighting style, the adverse effects of the electromagnetic field emitted from Sanae using the gauntlet were changed, Karama and Korama's emitted barrier were synchronized to react to Clan's shooting. Kiriha's continuous quick and correct instructions turned the situation of the battlefield even more to Koutarou's favor.

As expected from Kiriha-sama… nobody can keep up with her sharp mind…

Processing vast amounts of information, Ruth secretly felt relieved. She couldn't keep herself from feeling so by Kiriha's great intelligence. Thinking about it, it was strange that they had not been beaten by her shortly after they met.

At that moment, above the two girls, Karama and Korama repelled Clan's scattered beam with their barrier.

Thanks to that, Koutarou was completely unscathed.

“These things again!? They just keep moving around!!”

Irritated, Clan changed the setting of the rifle so the beam would regain its focus and repeatedly fired towards Koutarou and the others.

“Koutarou, she's firing lots of those things again!”

“It's okay, I can see them all!!”

“Ho-, HoHo-!”

“Too slow Ho-!”

However, her desperate attack couldn't harm Koutarou who was under the effect of Sanae's spiritual powers, nor even the haniwas.

Ruth's information sure is accurate… has her meticulous nature revealed itself…?

Kiriha slightly smiled as she looked at the haniwas. It was a smile created by a mix of joy and admiration. The haniwas had been able to dodge the beam thanks to Ruth's accurate information. If she had not finished her analysis, the haniwas would probably either be destroyed or use up a lot of energy to block the attacks. So while she was thankful for the accuracy of Ruth's data, she smiled at Ruth's meticulous nature.

Answer and Prayer

“Let's go, Sanae!”

“Yeah!”

Dodging the rain of beams, Koutarou closed in on Clan. The armor's flight capabilities made it seem light on the contrary to the armor's looks. While manipulating gravity to fly, by igniting the emergency boosters and the thrusters used for posture control, it allowed him to fly freely, like Sanae. Clan flew through manipulating gravity as well, but Koutarou who had extra propelling devices could move faster.

“Koutarou!!”

“Please!”

Koutarou swung the sword in his right hand, and at the same time Sanae manipulated his left to shoot out a fireball and a lightning bolt.

“That left hand is annoying! But it's just a toy compared to the Blue Knight's gauntlet!”

Clan shifted all of the energy she was using to fly into her barrier.

When she was flying, the barrier was weak and would be unable to block Sanae's fireball or electricity. On top of that, the fireball and lightning bolt chased after her like a missile. Sanae used her spiritual powers to twist their trajectory. Clan might have been able to dodge them with her mobility, but it wasn't a wise bet.

So Clan stopped flying for a moment, and while free falling, she poured all of the freed up energy into her barrier. She had to block the fireball and lightning bolt before she could carry on.

Countless translucent, white hexagon tiles appeared around Clan. It was a repulsion barrier created by the device attached to the back of her waist. As the fireball and lightning bolt crashed into it, the barrier erased them while making a grating noise.

“Next is-!!”

But Clan had no time to rest. She pointed her beam rifle forwards. At that moment, Koutarou was flying towards her. While Clan had strengthened her barrier, Koutarou had closed the distance.

“Take thiiiiis!!”

“As if I'd be taken down that easily!!”

Koutarou swung his sword at full force, aiming to break through her barrier. In order to prevent him, Clan pulled the trigger on her rifle.

“It won't work Koutarou!”

“No, it'll be fine!!”

Sanae warned Koutarou of the danger, but he swung his sword without hesitation.

I can do this! I can win! As if I'd let her ruin our play!!

Koutarou was really angry. Clan had come and gotten in the way of their plays twice for her own selfish reasons now not to mention the fact that she was trying to kill Theia. A blinding rage drove Koutarou forward. And in response to his powerful will, the treasured sword, Saguratin's blade began shining with a pure-white light.

What happened next left Clan at a loss for words.

“Uooooooooooooo!!”

Answer and Prayer

When the beam fired from Clan's rifle came into contact with Koutarou's sword, the sword carried on forward and cut the beam in half. The split beam wavered and flew off to the sides.

“What, that's!?”

Clan couldn't believe what she had just seen.

That's impossible, how could he possibly do something like that!?

Like Theia's Saguratin, Clan had been forged and given a treasured sword at birth. But that sword had no special powers. It was just a commemorative gift to celebrate her birth; both Clan and Theia's swords were just supposed to be normal swords.

Even if the armor was supplying the sword with power, she couldn't imagine it could supply enough energy to be able to cut a beam in half. It wasn't something a personal combat suit's generator had enough output to do.

Because Clan was so well versed in science she understood that Koutarou's power was abnormal, and couldn't help but feel surprise and fear.

“Oh no!”

At that moment, the glowing white sword's blade closed in on Clan. The barrier had already used up a lot energy blocking the fireball and lightning bolt, so Koutarou's sword cut through the barrier like it was paper.

Koutarou then aimed for Clan with his returning swing. With the barrier completely erased by the previous attack, Clan was completely defenseless.

I'll get hit!?

Realizing that, Clan unhesitatingly threw away her rifle. She couldn't possibly dodge Koutarou's attack while carrying around that large, heavy rifle. She kicked it away and distanced herself from Koutarou.

The next moment, Koutarou's sword cut the rifle in half. The rifle caused a small explosion and fell down towards the back of the gym in pieces. While his vision was blocked by the explosion, Clan put a lot of distance between herself and Koutarou.

“So close!”

“But with this she's unarmed!”

As the explosion cleared, Koutarou grabbed his sword in both hands and pointed the tip of it towards Clan.

“If you're going to give up, now would be the time.”

“You want me to surrender to some neanderthal from a backwater planet!? Quit joking around!!”

Unarmed, Clan bravely refused to surrender. Having lots of pride like Theia, Clan simply couldn't accept having to surrender.

I guess that's expected from a princess… But what would Theia do in her situation?

While staring at Clan, Koutarou thought of Theia. In the past, Theia probably wouldn't have accepted having to surrender, just like Clan was now. But Koutarou felt that if the current Theia were to lose despite her best efforts, she would accept her defeat and praise the other party.

I guess you could call it a princess, no, a ruler's composure…

That was the fundamental difference between Theia and Clan. And being able to sense that was proof of Koutarou's acceptance of Theia.

Answer and Prayer

That said, when she's playing games with me, she will probably never accept defeat…

The side of her that's a princess, and the childish side of a girl of age; right now, Koutarou accepted both those sides of Theia.

“I can't accept a joke like surrendering… but…”

While Koutarou was thinking of Theia, Clan was racking her brain about her current situation.

To think the fake Blue Knight had this much power…

Clan hadn't just simply attacked. She had sent home her personal battleship, Hazy Moon, to Forthorthe using autopilot and attacked Koutarou when he was separated from Harumi and Theia.

Of course, Clan hadn't underestimated Koutarou. She had analyzed the data from their previous battle and prepared her equipment so she could win against that. The beam rifle, her flying and her barrier would have been more than enough to win against Koutarou two months ago.

However, once put into practice, the results spoke for themselves. Clan's attacks were completely ineffective and she couldn't block Koutarou's attacks. Everything had completely exceeded her expectations.

Without my weapon, I'm definitely going to lose. Since they are faster, I'm going to have a hard time escaping too. But I still have that!

Clan grinned despite her hopelessly desperate situation.

What's up with Clan…?

As Koutarou had a bad feeling about her expression, Clan shouted out.

“Come, Cradle! Prepare to fire the super-space-time repulsion shell!”

It was the last resort that Clan had prepared.

What Clan called the Cradle was the small spaceship she was using.

In order to make Theia and Koutarou let down their guard, Clan had sent her personal battleship, Hazy Moon, back to Forthorthe. The Cradle was one of the spaceships onboard the Hazy Moon that she had used as her base of operations.

The Cradle served as an escape boat and had enough equipment to serve as an emergency base of operations. She had hidden the boat in the nearby mountains and used it as her base while observing Theia and Koutarou and creating her weapons. The beam rifle and her flying device were amongst the weapons she had created. She had also created the repulsion shell she had just mentioned.

“Fake Blue Knight, it doesn't matter how strong you are when faced with the Cradle's super-space-time repulsion shell!!”

Clan put her hands on her waist and boasted triumphantly. A strong will could be seen in her eyes through the glasses and her expression was overflowing with confidence.

Behind Clan was the spaceship, the Cradle. The egg-shaped spaceship had appeared using the same way Clan and Theia would summon their weapons. Although it was a small spaceship, the Cradle was still several dozen meters big. Its stately figure overcame even Clan's and it displayed its overwhelming sense of existence to the surrounding. If it wasn't for the ship's impressive stealth capabilities and Yurika's magic, the people nearby would already have erupted into a panic.

“The super-space-time repulsion shell…?”

Answer and Prayer

Koutarou blankly stared at the magnificence of the Cradle. Ignorant when it came to science, he had a hard time grasping what the weapon did by just the name.

“Fufufufu, you don't have to understand.”

Clan laughed as Koutarou tilted his head in confusion.

At the same time, the Cradle's body opened and revealed two missiles, each about as large as Clan. The cradle had the shape of an egg lying down sideways. The thickest part of the egg was the bow and the thinnest was the stern. Compared to the large ship, the missiles looked small, and to Koutarou, they seemed unreliable.

“That's because you will soon experience what they do with your body!!”

However, Clan had absolute confidence in her newly created bomb, the repulsion shells that the missiles were carrying. In theory, there was nothing they couldn't beat, that's the kind of bomb it was.

The super-space-time repulsion shell was something that Clan had been developing for a long time. The features of this weapon was that it could, as its name suggests, manipulate space-time. When this warhead was activated, it deployed a gigantic energy field that forcibly removed everything in that space from this universe. Regardless of how fast the enemy was or how powerful their barrier was, they couldn't escape or block an attack that would throw them out of this universe.

The attack was similar to a warp hole, but when warping, the destination was still in the same universe, so one would return there. And with missiles this size, there was a limit to how far they could warp, but there was no return once thrown out of the universe. One would need to develop the same technology to come back, which would be rather difficult when isolated on the outside of the universe.

It was next to impossible to evade. If it hit, there would be no returning anymore. That was where Clan's confidence came from.

This bomb had been completed just the other day. Clan had a prototype ready two months ago when she had attacked Theia, but Yurika had knocked her out before she had the chance to use it. Desiring a complete victory, Clan had waited for this weapon to be ready before attacking Koutarou. She wanted to defeat Koutarou no matter the cost; the repulsion shell was the proof of her determination.

Koutarou was of course unaware that. So at this rate, Koutarou was sure to be hit by the missile, but that was when Koutarou heard a voice informing him of the danger.

“Koutarou-sama, you can't let Clan-sama use that weapon…”

That voice didn't travel through the air as sound, instead of it entered his head directly. It was a voice that he would never have been able to hear if Sanae hadn't strengthened his senses.

“Who's there!? What are you saying!?”

“What's wrong, Koutarou!?”

“That weapon will bring extraordinary destruction…”

While Koutarou was still puzzled by the sudden voice, an image appeared in his head. It was the sight of the super-space-time repulsion shell being fired somewhere.

Koutarou saw people of a seemingly high status wearing similar clothes to what the nobles in the play were wearing, and people holding canes and wearing long robes. In their surroundings were various abnormal looking monsters. The monsters were holding a bottle filled with something black and spread out their wings, trying to take to the skies.

Answer and Prayer

The repulsion shell was flying towards them. There was a terrific flash, and a giant glowing cube was created. Everyone caught inside it was erased along with the ground. The only thing left was a giant hole and earthquake that could shake the planet.

When that terrifying image was sent to his head, Koutarou suddenly looked down towards his feet. He saw the Kitsushouharukaze high school and the gym; the cube that would be created by the super-space-time repulsion shell could easily fit both inside of it.

“I won't let you!!”

“Koutarou!?”

Immediately after that, Koutarou stormed forward. Sanae desperately struggled to hold on to Koutarou as he suddenly sprang into action.

If the repulsion shell was fired, there would be a lot of destruction. That had to be avoided at all costs; that was the only thing Koutarou was thinking about.

The only reason he had for that thought was the voice and image he had heard and seen, but he felt like he could believe it. The image was realistic and he could feel a straightforward kindness in the voice, he couldn't imagine it to be telling him lies.

“What's the matter all of a sudden, Koutarou!?”

“I need to destroy those missiles! We can't let her use them!”

Koutarou answered Sanae's question while setting the boosters on the armor to full power. Koutarou shot through the sky like a meteor. Intense winds swirled around them and roared loudly, so Sanae had to scream for Koutarou to hear her.

“What? Do you mean they're mushroom bombs!?”

“Something like that!”

By mushroom bomb, Sanae meant nuclear weapons. Koutarou nodded at her next question and sped up even more.

“That's why I need to destroy them before she can fire!”

The armor’s computer system screamed out as Koutarou sped up faster than what the armor had been designed for. But right now, Koutarou didn't have the time to worry about that.

“Will you be okay doing that, Koutarou!?”

“…That's why this is goodbye, Sanae.”

“Kyaaaaaaa!?”

Sanae was blown away from Koutarou's body all of a sudden. She hadn't been blown away by Koutarou, instead she was unable to hold on to his body as she felt something like electricity coursing through her.

“W-Wait, Koutarou!!”

Sanae quickly tried to chase after Koutarou, but something like an invisible wall stopped her and she couldn't follow him.

“Why!?”

That was the first time she had ever felt Koutarou clearly reject her ever since she began clinging onto his back on a daily basis.

Part 4

Having finished up her part in the coronation scene, Theia arrived at the back of the gym at the same time that Sanae was blown away from Koutarou. The only ones on the stage now were Harumi and some extras. The Silver Princess was holding a speech after becoming the new empress.

“Your highness!!”

“Ruth, what's the situation!?”

Though detailed information was being sent to Theia's bracelet, there was an unavoidable delay when the information was being sent. So she quickly asked Ruth for any new information.

“Just a moment ago, Satomi-sama was overwhelming Clan-sama, but she has summoned her spaceship and is seemingly trying for a large-scale attack.”

“Have the Blue Knight bombard her!”

“It's impossible! A little while ago a remarkable disturbance in both radio and hyperspace communications occurred, and I can't contact the Blue Knight!”

“What!?”

The reason for the disturbance was the super-space-time repulsion shell. In order for it to throw its target out of this universe, it had to save up energy a lot of energy. As it did, it created a large distortion in the surrounding space, and as a result, communications were blocked.

“It's mortifying, but there's nothing we can do right now except leave it to Koutarou.”

“Koutarou!”

While grinding her teeth, Theia stepped forward and looked up into the sky alongside Kiriha. Up in the sky was a knight wearing blue armor and a large spaceship.

Koutarou…

Seeing Koutarou dash forward out of her reach, Theia felt anxious, like she had a feeling that something bad was about to happen. The next moment, Sanae's words proved that feeling right.

“Everyone, do something! Stop Koutarou!”

“What is it!?”

“Koutarou is on a suicide mission!”

When Theia heard Sanae's word, she felt the world ground to a halt.

Aware of Koutarou's approach, Clan ordered the Cradle to counterattack. In order to fire the repulsion shell, the warhead needed more time to charge. In that time, she couldn't let Koutarou get close.

“You've finally appeared, Theiamillis-san! But it's already too late! Your play won’t have a happy ending!”

“Clan, I won't let you get in the way of this play!”

While dodging the barrage created by the Cradle, Koutarou closed in on the repulsion shell on the lower side of the hull. As he was pushed for time, Koutarou didn't approach unharmed. The beams and lasers had scratched him repeatedly, and his face and body were covered in wounds, just like the armor.

Answer and Prayer

However, Koutarou didn't flinch. What supported his courage was his promise on Christmas. That day, Koutarou had sworn to make the play a success to a lot of people. He couldn't let Clan destroy it for her own selfish reasons.

“This play is a small dream a caged bird saw!”

Koutarou knew how Theia felt about this play. It was a wish involving her admiration of the Blue Knight and desire to protect her mother. And this play embodied that wish; it was a small wish from Theia who was unable to live the way she wanted. Koutarou couldn't allow Clan to stamp out that dream.

“Can you protect everything!? You can't even protect your friends with that sword alone!!”

“I'll show you I can protect them!! That's because they all have to succeed with their invasions!!”

That was the answer Koutarou had finally arrived with in the midst of a fierce fight.

Koutarou wanted all of the girls’ invasions to succeed. He wanted to let Sanae wait in that room for her parents. He wanted Theia to complete her trial, to earn the right to become empress and protect her mother. He wanted Kiriha's people, the People of the Earth, to safely migrate to the surface. He wanted Yurika to live like a normal classmate.

He wanted all of them to win. He wanted all of them to grasp the future they wished for. Fulfilling all of their wishes might be hard, but he couldn't let all of their wishes be stomped out right now.

“Ooooooooo!!”

So Koutarou wouldn't stop.

Even if he was scorched by beams or penetrated by lasers.

“Stop it Koutarou!! Obey my orders!!”

Even if he made the golden glowing princess cry.

“You're my knight, aren't you!?”

“…Sorry, Theia.”

Koutarou simply let his sword shine bright white. He didn't care where that white light came from, or why it was there. As long as that light shone, he could protect everyone.

That was enough for Koutarou.

“Search for… a replacement knight right away.”

Answer and Prayer

“Wait, Koutarou wait!!”

And Theia finally realized her own feelings.

“Even if I find a replacement knight, there's no replacement for you!!”

That was Theia's answer. Theia truly desired Koutarou.

However, by the time she reached her answer, Koutarou's sword had cut the super-time-space repulsion shell in half.

At that moment, a giant glowing cube appeared above Kitsushouharukaze high school.

From the top of the stage, Harumi knew what had happened. The sword-shaped crest on her forehead let her know that Koutarou's presence had vanished.

Koutarou-sama…

While thinking about Koutarou, Harumi ran across the stage in accordance to the manuscript. Realizing that the Blue Knight was nowhere to be seen, the Silver Princess ran looking for him.

Farewell, Koutarou-sama…

Everything up until now had gone just as she had been informed, but she didn't know what would happen from now. Although she had a lot of power, she was not all-knowing.

And please, stay safe…

So Harumi, like the Silver Princess she was acting, prayed.

She prayed that she would meet her precious person that had vanished once more.

Promise

Part 1

Sunday, January 24

The super-time-space repulsion shell that Koutarou cut in half unleashed its stored energy and created a giant glowing cube. But since it hadn't fully charged, the cube didn't grow to be as large as Clan had designed it to be, so it was only large enough to cover the Cradle.

Once the glowing cube vanished, there was nothing left. No Koutarou, no Clan, no Cradle. Not even the air in that space remained. It was the very definition of a vacuum; there was nothing there but a void. Although it had been on a smaller scale, the repulsion shell worked just as designed.

The next moment, the air surrounding the void began stirring to repair the space. It created a large shake and at the same time, the repaired space was flooded with air immediately.

“Emergency deployment of the repulsion field! Maximize the range, it doesn't have to last long, just focus on its strength!”

“Karama, Korama, hold it in with the field!”

“Force Field – Modifier – Maximize – End – Effective Area – Colossal!”

However, the invading girls managed to prevent any accident by using their various defensive measures. If the cube had been larger they would have been in danger, but fortunately there was no damage to the surrounding area. Because of that, the play continued on as if nothing on had happened in the air above the gym.

However, unlike the surroundings that had returned to being peaceful, the girls left behind in the back of the gym were anything but. Koutarou had vanished into thin air alongside Clan and the Cradle. Without even knowing whether or not if he was alive, the girls were in disarray.

“Koutarou, where did you go!? Koutarou!?”

Sanae restlessly stared around her surroundings, looking for Koutarou's presence. But she couldn't find him no matter how long she looked. There hadn't ever been a time where she couldn't find Koutarou after looking for this long. Sanae was always in a state where their spiritual energies were connected, but now that bond had been completely cut.

No, it can't be true…

That could only mean one thing, but Sanae desperately tried not to think about it. To her, Koutarou had become a part of her life, she didn't want to think about having completely lost that.

“The signal from the maneuver suit has been lost!? Blue Knight, raise the sensor sensitivity and scan again! And give me the data on the last three minutes of space quakes!”

Ruth operated her bracelet with a pale face. The armor Koutarou was wearing had an identification signal, but with the appearance of the cube, that signal had vanished. That alone would have been enough to worry, but having knowledge of Forthorthe's science, Ruth had a faint understanding of what had happened.

Satomi-sama… there's no way you could have been thrown to the outskirts of space and time…

The data from the Blue Knight only served to support her prediction. The more she read, the more hopeless she felt.

Promise

It wasn't a simple feeling as if having lost something precious. It was more like having lost her light while walking in the night. She had lost what she needed to keep on walking, and was now standing still.

“Karama, Korama, search through all life in the area and filter for Koutarou's spiritual energy pattern.”

“Ho-, that will take time Ho-”

“I know that much! I still want you to do it!”

“Understood Ho-, we will get right on it Ho-!”

Kiriha was angry. She put her hands together and made a severe expression.

This kind of ending… I won't accept this kind of ending, Satomi Koutarou!

She ground her teeth; he was the only one on the surface that truly understood her, a true friend she could reveal her true self too. Losing him this easily was an unbearable pain.

However, Kiriha knew that Koutarou, having been in the middle of that, was not going to make it out in one piece. It was next to impossible to have survived being caught up in that.

That fact sunk into Kiriha's chest, and she couldn't help but feel anger at her own helplessness.

I am a cold woman…

She was angry that she was able to remain calm despite believing that Koutarou had died.

“In this situation, it'll be faster to search for that spaceship rather than Satomi-san!”

It's possible that the calmest one here was Yurika. In her case, she had experienced her predecessor's, Rainbow Nana's, last fight, so she had built up a little tolerance to the dangers of people close to her.

“If they really were sent off to a different dimension I might be able still be able to detect something that big…”

Yurika closed her eyes and focused on the cane in her hands. She heightened her magic and spread out her senses, searching for traces of Koutarou.

That was a spaceship, and Satomi-san was wearing a spacesuit… if I find him soon, he can still be saved…

Despite her close friends’ crisis, she didn't lose hope. That was the strength of a magical girl that had slowly grown within her.

“Koutarou…”

Amongst the five girls, Theia was the most crushed. She remained motionless with her hand reaching for the sky.

If it hadn't been for the timing, Theia probably would have behaved more courageously. But she had lost Koutarou the moment she had realized her feelings. The moment she realized what she truly desired, it slipped right through her fingers. In that situation, not even the princess of a galactic empire could remain calm.

“Don't leave me alone, Koutarou… You're just hiding, right? Don't be such a tease, hurry… hurry up and come out…”

She tried to smile, but she couldn't.

She tried to talk, but her throat got hoarse.

Promise

“Can't you understand that… that I'm telling you to come out… that's… that's why you're… a pleb…”

The only thing Theia could do was shed tears.

As everyone had lost sight of themselves-

“Space distortion reaction increasing, predicting a small-scale spacequake. Take precautions, my lady.”

Ruth's bracelet let out an abrupt warning.

“Eh…?”

And while Ruth's eyes opened wide in surprise, it came.

It was a glowing door, like the one that Theia and Ruth used to travel between room 106 and the Blue Knight. It suddenly appeared, stretching several dozen meters across the sky. It was in the same place where Koutarou had vanished.

“Detected a small-scale spacequake. It is predicted with a 95% probability to be a short warp.”

“A short warp!?”

Ruth hurriedly confirmed the data being projected in the air from her bracelet. Just as the bracelet had said, data indicating that something large was warping in was being displayed.

“Found it!”

At that moment, Yurika opened her eyes inside the Alunaya costume. And at the same time the tip of something came out from the door of light.

“Mass from the space distortion calculated. Reporting. It is with a 98% probability the ship being searched for. Target has been located, my lady.”

It was a large plate-shaped dome several dozen meters in size. Noticing that, Sanae shouted out.

“Something's appeared!”

In the direction that Sanae was pointing, the dome moved forward and passed through the door. From the ground, it looked like a balloon blowing up. By the time it reached some dozen meters, the balloon stopped growing, and the rear appeared. And the silhouette changed from a dome to an egg.

“That's the spaceship from before!?”

What had appeared was the spaceship that had disappeared in the cube from before.

It was the Cradle. With the sudden appearance and return of that ship, not even the normally calm Kiriha could hide her surprise.

“Koutarou!”

Seeing the Cradle float in the sky, Theia shouted out and called for Koutarou right away. She then looked around the area, she was desperate.

Where are you, Koutarou!

She hoped that Koutarou would return alongside the Cradle, or possibly even riding it.

“Where are you!? Hurry up and show yourself!!”

However, Koutarou was nowhere to be seen. The bottom of the ship where he had been was nowhere to be seen, neither was the second super-space-time repulsion shell.

Promise

It couldn't be that Clan left Koutarou behind and came back on her own…?

A worry began budding in Theia's chest. And it wasn't just her; all five girls shared the same worry.

At that moment, a hatch at the thickest part of the egg opened. The five girls all stared at the hatch, praying that Koutarou would appear from it.

“We're here!! We made it in time!!”

However, as if betraying the girls’ trust, the one that appeared from the hatch was the Cradle's owner, Clan.

“Ah…”

Theia felt like she was sinking to the bottom of a deep darkness. Her tears that had stopped began flowing once more.

“Koutarou…”

“Satomi-sama…”

Kiriha and Ruth also revealed a sad expression and dropped their shoulders. Although it had only been a small hope, their disappointment was deep.

“…Huh?”

“Is this!?”

However, Sanae and Yurika weren't. In contrast to Theia and the others, their eyes sparkled and they got even more hopeful and instinctively leaned forwards.

“There's no time. Hurry up and get off, Clan!”

“Kyaaaaaaaaaa!?”

The next moment, Koutarou who had come from behind Clan as he kicked her out.

Part 2

Koutarou followed after Clan and jumped out from the hatch. The next moment, the Cradle disappeared from view. Standing out would be bad, so the Cradle concealed itself in accordance to the orders it had been given in advance.

“Hoh.”

Not minding the several dozen meter-long fall, Koutarou's sky colored armor rang out as he vividly landed. It was completely different from Clan, who had landed in a fluster the moment before.

“What kind of education have you received to make you think you can treat a princess like this!?”

“That's because we're out of time and you're just wasting it.”

“We're only running out of time because you overslept!”

“Stop talking and start running! We don't have any time!”

“Geez, you're so selfish!”

While arguing, the two of them ran towards Theia and the others. Meanwhile the five girls stared at them astonished.

Clan and Koutarou had gone missing after a fierce battle with no one knowing if they have lived or died. And now the two of them had appeared from the Cradle and it was like they had completely changed as they showed no signs of fighting like just before. Although they were arguing, it wasn't the kind of argument enemies would have. It was at the same level as what could often be heard in room 106.

That bizarre and mysterious scene was enough to leave the five invaders dumbfounded.

“What's going on with that…?”

“W-Who knows…”

So even Sanae and Yurika who noticed ahead of time that Koutarou was alive couldn't do anything but blink.

“Besides, how can you oversleep at such an important time!?”

“That's why I said you should wake me up early!!”

“Are you telling a princess to babysit her knight!?”

“Theia did!!”

“Well, I'm terribly sorry!!”

What had changed wasn't just their relationship, both Koutarou's and Clan's appearances had changed slightly from just before.

The armor Koutarou was wearing had more damage than before. It wasn't damage from lasers and beams either; there were dents from being hit by something hard and his mantle had large cuts, the variety of forms of damage had increased greatly. And there were now two swords by Koutarou's waist. Just a moment ago there had been one, but he had gotten another from somewhere.

Clan's appearance was odd as well. She was wearing the same dress as before, but she had a large overcoat on top. It looked like something a noble's daughter would wear when heading out to town.

But to the girls, Koutarou's change in appearance was but a minor problem. Their surprise that Koutarou was fine and in front of them was so large that they didn't have any room to pay any attention to his change in appearance.

Roughly two minutes had passed since the cube had appeared. During that short moment, they had panicked, worried and mourned. Just having gone away was a huge event in and of itself, but having returned the next moment was a series of shocks for the girls. Their feelings had been thrown for a loop and they were still unable to take any concrete actions.

“Clan, what's the time!?”

“One more minute! We somehow made it in time!”

Neglecting the five girls, Koutarou and Clan were heading towards the back entrance into the gym.

“W-Wait, Koutarou, what happened!?”

“Satomi-san, what is going on!?”

As Koutarou appeared in front of them, Sanae and Yurika questioned him. Having noticed Koutarou earlier, they had recovered faster than the other three.

“Sorry, we'll take that later, the play comes first now!!”

But Koutarou didn't answer Sanae and Yurika, and passed by the two alongside Clan. He was heading towards the stage of the play. The last scene was about to start, so he didn't have the time to answer their question.

He then continued past Kiriha and Ruth. But as he reached Theia, Koutarou stopped moving for the first time. He then passed the manuscript in his right hand to Clan.

“Clan, hold my script!!”

“Ber— no, Koutarou, how long are you planning on treating me like your servant!?”

While complaining to Koutarou, Clan caught the flying manuscript. Despite her dissatisfied words, she preciously held it towards her chest.

“I'm still a princess of the Holy Forthorthe—”

“Now's not the time for that! I'm in a hurry so quit your yapping and carry it!”

“Ahh, Geez, you're so selfish! You're always like that!”

Clan was still complaining, but Koutarou ignored her. Like when he didn't answer Sanae's and Yurika's questions, he didn't have the time to deal with Clan either.

“Theia, come!”

“Eh, Ah…?”

Koutarou grabbed Theia's hand forcibly pulled her to his side.

“I know you're surprised, you're needed!”

Three people were needed for the last scene. The Blue Knight, the Silver Princess and the Golden Princess. So if the Golden Princess, Theia, wasn't around, the last scene couldn't start.

“Ah…”

You're needed.

Theia was finally able to affirm somewhere deep inside her that Koutarou was safe after hearing those words and feeling the warmth of his hand.

Promise

“K-Koutarou…”

The next moment, Theia's knees gave way. She couldn't stand because of the deep relief and joy that was overwhelming here.

Promise

Promise

“Ah, h-hey!”

In order to keep Theia from falling over, Koutarou hurriedly held onto her.

“I see, so you were safe, Koutarou… I'm so…”

In response to Koutarou holding her, tears began flowing out from Theia's eyes again. In the weak winter sun, the tears shone iridescent.

“Don't cry, from— Ah, no, actually keep crying. We'll be doing the parting scene soon.”

Having lost her power to stand, Koutarou lifted Theia up with his arms as she cried. He was planning on carrying her to the stage like that.

“No, this isn't a parting.”

Theia shook her head and gently touched Koutarou's left hand that was lifting her legs and looked straight at him.

“…Everything is just about to start…”

Tears were still flowing from her eyes, but Theia had finally regained her smile.

“It's just as you say, Theia.”

Koutarou started running again.

He didn't have the time to stop running. Inside the gym were a lot of comrades waiting for him and Theia.

He would definitely make the play a success.

That was the promise Koutarou had made with the invading girls and later their drama club comrades. The time to fulfill that promise had finally arrived.

So Koutarou impatiently ran into the gym while holding Theia.

Afterword

Long time no see everybody. Since there's not much room for the afterword this time I'll keep it short.

There were a lot of suspicious developments this episode. I'm sure you want to know what happened to those two after that. Next time is a story about what happened to Koutarou while he was gone. Next time it'll have a subtitle for once, since it's an irregular story, I guess it'll be treated as a side chapter.

As for my recent situation, the friend who had a child that I wrote about in a previous afterword opened his own store. I went to take a look and it was a beautiful new building. I better work harder so I don't lose to him. Wife, child, store. Aren't thing going too well, you enviable bastard, lol.

Ah, looks like I'm already out of room. I'll have to shorten my normal thanks. Thank you as always, everyone involved. And all you readers, lets meet again in volume 7.5 'The Silver Princess and the Blue Knight.'\

December, 2010

Takehaya

Corona Convention
NEW!
2010/1/31
Article 11
Any cheating done by Nijino Yurika (Resident of room 106) will only be the subject of criticism in the case that it's revealed.